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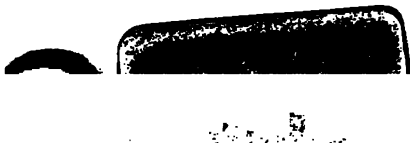
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THE MILDMAYES
OR
THE CLERGYMAN'S SECRET.

THE MILDMAYES

OR

THE CLERGYMAN'S SECRET

A Story of Twenty Years Ago.

BY
DANBY NORTH.

"What hath come to thee? In thy hollow eye,
"And hueless cheek, and thine unquiet motions,
"Sorrow, and shame, and conscience seem at war
"To waste thee."

BYRON's *Marino Faliero*.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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TO
Q. R.,
WITH SINCERE REGARD,
THE FOLLOWING STORY
IS
INSCRIBED.

ERRATUM.

VOL. I., p. 154, line 7, for "Rachel" read "Mary."

THE MILD MAYES ;

OR,

THE CLERGYMAN'S SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

“Do you know, Sir John, who is this young Mr. Wilmot, that we are to ballot for to-day ?” said Mr. Jessop, one of the committee of the Palladium Club, to Sir John Cowley ; who, like Mr. Jessop himself, was waiting in the committee-room of the Palladium for the arrival of the other members of the chosen eleven, who decided on the fitness of the candidates seeking for admission into the club.

“Not I,” cried the baronet ; “but here

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comes Tom Oldershaw, who knows everybody, and who is the seconder of Wilmot. He will doubtless give you the information that you desire. Ah, Oldershaw! there, you are just in time to answer for your friend Mr. Wilmot. We have been just discussing whether we should not black-ball him, seeing we know nothing at all about him."

"Nay, nay, you must not think of any such thing," cried Tom Oldershaw. "Young Wilmot is an excellent fellow. I will tell you all about him; and you ought to have a kind feeling for him, Sir John, as his father and you were such friends at Eton together."

"God bless me!" cried the baronet, "can this be a son of my old friend and schoolfellow? Jack Wilmot was one of the best fellows that ever lived, the soul of fun and whim, the most joyous of associates, the friend and boon companion of the Prince Regent; a man who never lost his duns or his popularity through a long life."

"The very same, Sir John. Poor Jack Wilmot has left three boys behind him, and this is the eldest of them. We are trying to get him forward in public life, as his

father left him nothing but his wit and talents. He is now in the — Office, where Lord Ulverston, from recollection of his father, gave him a clerkship. He is a deucedly clever fellow, and if not so witty as his father was, he is far steadier, and he has, unless I am greatly mistaken, qualities that will make him win his way through the world."

"Egad!" cried Sir John Cowley, "I will vote for him with the greatest pleasure, and I will be delighted to make his acquaintance. I must have him to dine with me, and you two must come. And so it turns out that Henry Wilmot, Esquire, of —, New-street, Spring-gardens, is son of Jack Wilmot. Let me see: I am now in my sixty-seventh year, and his father must be dead these nineteen years. Gad! how time does fly!"

"Jack Wilmot," said Mr. Jessop, "was certainly a very fascinating fellow. That affair of his with Lady Rockforest turned out most unluckily."

"Yes," said Oldershaw, "she was a most malignant person. Poor Jack was only a wit: he amused the Prince Regent, and said and wrote sharp things on the

Opposition, and had a courtier's reward in oblivion. I hope that his son Harry, for whom I am warmly interested, will meet with a better fate."


"By the way," asked Mr. Jessop, "where is Lady Rockforest? or is the old dame still alive?"

"She is still living at Catesby Court, I believe," answered the other. And then the conversation turned upon the gloominess and dismal grandeur of a place with which the reader will be better acquainted presently.

At the time while the committee of the Palladium were discussing the eligibility of Harry Wilmot as a candidate for the membership of the club, the subject of the conversation was thirty miles from town, in the bay-window of the Falcon, the principal inn in the old-fashioned country town of Dryford, in Kent. He was in his twenty-third year, very tall and slight, but perfectly erect, with singular elegance of carriage. Few persons possessed an exterior so interestingly attractive as young Wilmot: his face had a peculiar brightness of expression, indicating intellect and good-will; his features were good, and,

without being what is called handsome, his countenance was irresistibly pleasing, —the smile that occasionally lighted it up was sure to gain sympathy from any one looking at him; his forehead was high and intellectual, and his light hair curled gracefully over his temples. There was something about his dress and entire appearance that told of grace and breeding, and indicated that if Wilmot were not himself a man of fashion, he was connected with those who were persons of high pretensions.

The gentleman near him was evidently a clergyman, and in some respects presented a contrast to his companion. The Reverend Eustace Mildmaye, curate of Sommerleigh, was as handsome a young man as might be seen anywhere; yet, whether it was that his professional decorum too much subdued his vivacity of temperament, or that he was naturally heavy, his appearance had not the immediately winning effect resulting from the keen, vivid, bright look possessed by Wilmot. It was impossible, however, for any one to deny that the curate was remarkably handsome. His eyes were large, lustrous, and dark;



his hair was raven black ; his mouth, teeth, and nose were faultless.

“And who could have expected to see you in this *ultima thule*, Wilmot ?” cried the young clergyman.

“I had not the least idea of coming here, but Lord Ulverston has desired me to remain for the next three or four days at Longwoods. There are two or three of us down from the — Office ; and having an idle day I cantered over to see this old place, never thinking that I was to meet a college friend here. Who the deuce is that old lady in the barouche ? What an extraordinary countenance, and what a look of an old demirep ! And yet there is something commanding and powerful in her countenance.”

“Ah, that’s an extraordinary woman !” cried the curate, with a sigh : “that old lady has seen life in all its vanity, pomp, and wickedness. Of illustrious lineage, once possessing beauty and great talents, connected with the noblest in the land, she now survives her reputation, and vegetates in obscurity, with a blasted reputation.”

“You surprise me !” cried Wilmot, with an air of great curiosity. “’Tis an extra-


ordinary face, the more you look upon it. What eyes! The nose and mouth indicate no ordinary firmness and vigour: and what a strange and wild expression is over the whole face!"

"She is half, if not entirely mad," said the curate.

"Who is she? All you have said excites my curiosity."

"Cannot you guess?" cried the curate: "that lady is the noted, the only too celebrated Lady Rockforest."

"Lady Rockforest!" cried Harry Wilmot. "Is that she, really?" His countenance suddenly was shadowed over by thought, and he looked very grave. "How her very name awakens a long train of thought! She was one of my poor father's friends—I ought to say acquaintances. Lady Rockforest! what a life she has led! and yet she seems still vigorous. She reminds me of an old oak that I have seen shattered by the tempest, but still with its roots in the soil, and with robust vigour in its trunk, though its branches and foliage have perished: so she survives in the land, after her fair glory has been blasted and her beauty been annihilated by time."



“And by her own terrible passions,” interrupted the curate. “She generally resides at Catesby Court, a place that I have never seen, as few persons have ever passed its gates ; it is nearly fourteen miles from here : but she sometimes sojourns at a cottage in this neighbourhood, for the sake of change of air.”

A waiter entered the room with a message from the magistrate’s clerk, and for a few minutes the young clergyman left Wilmot by himself.

The latter continued to stand in the window, his mind half in reverie, as his fancy conjured up visions of the life that Lady Rockforest had led, and as he recollected some of the anecdotes that he had heard of the days, when his own father was a prominent member of the society of which Lady Rockforest had been one of the evil stars. Her look fascinated him as something supernatural. There was, indeed, mingled with the remains of her beauty an indescribable air of fierce and haughty arrogance. Her bold-browed visage told a plain tale of the force of her character, and Wilmot felt that he was gazing upon the remains of one who had triumphed in

guilty charms, and who in the heyday of her youth had been the personification of wicked and audacious beauty.

But his eyes were soon attracted in another direction, by the sight of something far more pleasing. An open carriage drove up to a shop next the Falcon, and from his bay-window Wilmot obtained a full sight of two of the most charming girls he had ever seen, just risen into womanhood. They were dressed like each other, and possessed such a family likeness as sisters might be supposed to have, though their style of beauty was different.

"Ah, by Jove! Mildmaye, come here at once, and tell me who are those girls in the carriage? I am most anxious to know their names."

"Dear me! what a look of rapture there's in your face!" cried the curate, coming forward as the door closed upon the waiter, dismissed with an answer. He might well have been struck with the eager and animated expression in Wilmot's countenance. It was lit up with feelings of exuberant pleasure. He seemed to survey the scene from the bay-window with a feeling of uncommon ardour and curiosity.

"Heyday! who have we got here?" cried the curate, kissing his hands to the two ladies in the carriage, which had drawn up with its horses facing those of Lady Rockforest. The fair occupants of the britzka returned the curate's salutation with great cordiality, and with smiling countenances, which possibly would have been even less reserved, were it not for their observing the tall and handsome stranger standing in the window. "Ah!" continued the curate, "my pretty cousins; so then you have come into town to rummage the milliners' shops for finery to figure in at the Dryford ball next week. Wilmot, I hope that you will be in the neighbourhood then, and I will have pleasure in introducing you to my fair cousins. I must run down and speak to them. Come along with me."

How little did the young curate, his gay-hearted friend by his side, the two young beauties in the britzka, and the old lady in the barouche, know that even then Fate was weaving their destinies together in a strange and mysterious manner! Would the faces of these glad some girls have then been so smiling, if some power had given

them the faculty of looking forward, and catching a sight of the tribulations which it was their destiny to go through?

While the curate and his friend are descending the staircase of the Falcon, let us tell who were the girls in the carriage, that so much attracted the eager notice of Wilmot.

CHAPTER II.

THE Mildmayes were one of the most ancient families in Kent. The head of the family was Sir Oswald Mildmaye, a second cousin of the girls in the britzka, and of the young curate. Unfortunately, family quarrels had severed the acquaintance of various branches of the Mildmayes : but George Mildmaye of Boxwood, the father of Caroline and Louisa Mildmaye, was greatly respected through all Kent ; and the reputed extent of his wealth added considerably to the effect produced by his urbane manners, and by the liberal hospitality which he maintained at Boxwood. His daughters were looked upon as heiresses, and their beauty, attractive manners, and graceful accomplishments,

directed much of the attention of the Kent society towards them.

Let us take a leisurely view of them as they are lounging back in the seat of their carriage. Caroline is really the elder of the two by a year, though, somehow, a stranger might suspect her to be the youngest. Her height is what is considered tall for a woman, and her figure is more developed than that of her sister Louisa. Notwithstanding the family likeness between them, there is considerable difference between their styles. The prevailing expression of Caroline's countenance is exquisite softness and repose. A serene yet thoughtful placidity reigns over her features, whose calmness is very beautiful, yet by no means indicative of apathy. On the contrary, you would expect her to be impulsive and susceptible if chance cast her into circumstances likely to awaken strong feelings. Her eyes are large, full, and dark,—they are well opened, and clearly set; her forehead is rather low, but wide, and a profusion of dark hair well becomes her complexion, which is neither fair, nor brown, nor olive, but appears a mixture of all three, the brown perhaps pre-

dominating. Beneath her Grecian nose is a mouth with pouting lips, and the softness of her chin completes the general idea left in the mind of an observer of her rather plastic and yielding disposition.

Louisa Mildmaye has a countenance which, with less of perfectly beautiful features than her sister's, is more calculated to arrest the attention. The finest feature she possessed was her magnificent hazel eyes, of a size unusually large : her complexion is fair, her cheek somewhat too thin ; a connoisseur might say that her mouth was too large, but he could not chide it, while it showed such a matchless set of teeth, as, whether by design or unconsciously, Louisa Mildmaye showed as she laughed or spoke ; her chesnut hair was tastefully arranged, and admirably became her countenance. Seated in a britzka, her figure could not be well judged of, but in the dance, or the drawing-room, her gracefully moulded form and elegance of carriage defied criticism. When Louisa Mildmaye smiled she produced great effect ; her whole face beamed with what appeared to be the fire of genius, her aspect became far more animated than what Caroline

could exhibit. There was, however, one defect in Louisa greater than could be shown in Caroline: her profile was spoiled by her nose being rather *retroussé*. As you looked at her full face this defect was not observed, but it was evident when she turned sideways. Perhaps the splendour of her eyes atoned as a set-off against this defect.

In talents and accomplishments the Mildmaye girls were far beyond the average. Caroline Mildmaye was a most accomplished musician, and an admirable singer. Her *soprano* voice was full, rich, and clear. Her playing was first-rate, and would have perhaps conferred celebrity on a professional person, yet several preferred Louisa as a pianist, deeming her touch of the keys to be lighter and more brilliant than her sister's. In languages Caroline carried the palm from her younger sister. With Italian, German, and French she was thoroughly conversant, while Louisa spoke but French, and could read Italian only with difficulty. But on the other hand, Louisa had read more deeply of solid literature, and liked to peruse the volume of history, over which Caroline would give

a suppressed yawn. While Caroline cared little for English literature, Louisa Mildmaye liked to trace the English spirit through various periods. At the pencil again, Caroline was the more facile and graceful; her pencillings were deservedly admired; but Louisa's pen in correspondence was sharper, livelier, and stronger. Thus there was a balance between them, and it was a matter of taste to say which of them was most charming. In the manners of Caroline there was more equability and consistency, and she was perhaps more generally popular. On the other hand, those who knew Louisa well, far preferred her to the elder sister; for it was characteristic of Louisa that she was cold to the crowd, and cordial with the few.

Caroline was now in the twenty-first, and Louisa in her twentieth year. For the last two years they had been reigning *belles* in the part of Kent where they resided, and opinion was greatly divided as to which of them was most attractive. The majority of voices would perhaps have decided for Caroline; but if the question had come to a poll, the pride of Louisa might have been gratified in thinking that

the most intelligent suffrages were given in her favour.

Such were the beauties who were now approached by their cousin, Eustace Mildmaye, and his friend Harry Wilmot. Compelled to record faithfully the feelings of all the parties, we must frankly narrate the fact, as the very graceful figure and fashionable form of Wilmot appeared, accompanying their cousin, that each of the Mildmaye girls felt curiosity to know who was the peculiarly gentlemanly-looking person who sauntered with well-bred ease after Eustace Mildmaye.

"Ah, ah, my pretty cousins," said Eustace Mildmaye; "so you are preparing for the Vanity Fair of next Wednesday night."

"You're not in the pulpit now, Eustace," cried Louisa Mildmaye, "so pray spare us a lecture, or reserve it for another time."

"I am afraid," said the curate, "that this would be a very bad time to lecture about going to balls, as I wish to canvass a friend of mine for his presence at the ball on Wednesday night. Allow me to introduce him—Mr. Wilmot:" and he

went through the ceremony of introducing. As Wilmot raised his hat, and disclosed his fair hair curling over his high and bold forehead, and as he met the eyes of the sisters, both of the latter felt that they had scarcely ever before seen any one who made at a first glance so very favourable an impression. Nor were Wilmot's own feelings very different, for as he stood near the carriage he was even more decisively struck with the grace and beauty of the Mildmaye girls, than when he had regarded them from the bay-window of the Falcon. Which of the two made the most favourable impression on him? At first, it was Louisa, the youngest of the two, but whom he mistook for the elder. Her smile, the vivid expression of her countenance, and the brightness of her eyes, caught him more than her sister's calmer style. But after three minutes' conversation he would have pronounced a different opinion, without, perhaps, being able to assign the cause, though we will do it for him. Louisa's voice was pitched in a high key, and sounded somewhat sharply on the ear; while the rich and, if we might say,

luscious tones of Caroline's organ were delicious to the ear.

"Mr. Wilmot is an old college friend of mine," said Eustace; "you have often heard me speak of him. He is staying now at Lord Ulverston's, at Longwoods, and I hope that he may come over to our ball."

"I fear," cried Louisa, "that a Kent ball can have little attractions for one used to London society."

"On the contrary," said Wilmot; "in what attractions can it be wanting? What better society can England show than the gentry of Kent can exhibit? Three of the beauties at the last Drawing-room, who won the greatest admiration, were from Kent, and the last and only real living copy of the 'good old country gentleman, all of the olden time,' is to be sought for only in Kent."

"If the good old gentleman be caught here!" cried Louisa Mildmaye, "I doubt whether he'll be caught in a waltz or a quadrille."

"Oh, doubtless, his top-boots, and his reverence for the dances established by the wisdom of his ancestors, would prevent

him from innovation in the ball-room, as in the Senate."

"Oh, country gentlemen," said Eustace, "know as little about ball-rooms as foreign affairs."

"One," continued Louisa Mildmaye, smiling, "may be brilliant at both; Lord Ulverston, for example," looking towards Wilmot with a smile.

"Ah! yes," cried he. "Lord Ulverston enjoys the rush of public life as much as a guardsman does a whirl round Almack's. He dashes at a debate with as much buoyancy as if he were darting down the middle in a country dance at Christmas. The difference between him and the rest of the ministers is this, that he dances everywhere, whereas the other ministers never dance anywhere, save in the cabinet."

"As Lord Ulverston," said Caroline, "is so fond of revolution in general, I could wish that he and Lady Ulverston would honour the Dryford ball with their presence: it would not be a very violent piece of innovation if they visited our Dryford Almack's."

"Oh, Cary, how can you suggest such

a thing? A patroness of Almack's to come all the way from Longwoods to us!"

"I will take care this very evening to suggest the idea to Lady Ulverston, and, unless she has very pressing engagements in London, I hope to be able to induce her to come." Wilmot said this with an air of great gallantry, and raised his hat ever so slightly to the Mildmaye girls. His manner, his look, his voice, his whole air were fascinating, and both the Mildmayes felt a degree of pleasure that they had never before experienced at any introduction.

"I am glad to hear you speak so," said Eustace Mildmaye, "as that tells me you will come to our Dryford ball yourself."

"Well, I shall be certainly at your Dryford ball next Wednesday; unless, indeed," said Wilmot, "I should be prevented by some malign influence."

At the very moment of his pronouncing the words "malign influence," the carriage in which the Mildmayes were seated received a sudden jolt, which somewhat alarmed them. It was caused by Lady Rockforest's coachman locking one of his wheels against their fore-wheel; but there

was no damage done, and Lady Rockforest drove off. She had risen up from her seat to see what the matter was, and in passing the Mildmayes she was standing up in her carriage; and, whether intentionally or not, Lady Rockforest scowled at the Mildmayes with a frown, as if she was uttering some secret imprecation against them. Wilmot remarked the scowl, and Eustace Mildmaye broke silence as Lady Rockforest rode on.

“Malign influence, you were alluding to, Wilmot; and the lady who passed seemed its personification.” He was going to add more, but observed the grave faces of his cousins, who, however, tried to seem as if they had not noticed the fact of Lady Rockforest driving by. They little knew that the scowl she had given was like the shadow of the cloud that she was to cast upon them. But it has been fortunately arranged that we cannot look forward into the future course, and see what destiny is preparing for us.

After some careless conversation the Mildmayes drove away, leaving their cousin and Wilmot together: the latter returned to luncheon at the hotel.

"Upon my word, Mildmaye, you have got a charming pair of cousins. I was told that there were no lions to be seen at Dryford, and I have been most agreeably surprised. It is not often that any one sees two such beauties together at a time: to which branch of your family do they belong?"

"I thought that I had told you they were the Mildmayes of Boxgrove. Their father was the elder brother of mine, and mine, you are aware, fell in India. George Mildmaye, of Boxgrove, has been a most fortunate man in the world, and has vastly increased his paternal fortune by mercantile speculations. He is only too fond of money-making."

"Is their mother alive?"

"No; she has been dead for some years. She was one of the St. Pierres, of Rochelle Park."

"Oh, then your fair cousins have a dash of the Huguenot blood in them, and that can be no disadvantage, for the Huguenots who have settled in this empire have turned out very well."

"Yes, and we can trace their blood down through generations of a family."

We are doubly connected with the St. Pierres, for St. Pierre, of Belvyddyr Hall, in Wales, is uncle to my cousins, and he married one of his own relatives, who is also related to us—one of the Woodfords, of Woodleigh House, whose mother was also a St. Pierre.”

“There is something of a foreign look about one of your cousins.”

“Oh, decidedly. I never look upon Cary’s half-brunette complexion, and her dark hair and eyelashes, and observe her manners, without thinking of *la Touraine*.”

“Oh, surely the fair Louisa has more French manner—more vivacity.”

“Apparently so ; but Caroline has more of what the French call *sentiment*.”

“There is something about them both that gives me the idea that they are girls of superior mind. Am I right?”

“It would be difficult to find girls more accomplished. But their father has taken uncommon pains with them. There is a vein of indolence in their natures, which often accompanies talent, but he has successfully struggled to conquer it in them.”

“A parent and a pedagogue!”

"Nay, you are too hard on my dear uncle. He is neither pedant nor pedagogue, but he looks after their studies and pursuits with great interest, and is always preaching upon the text of the vast value of mental resources to persons in all conditions of life, and in the hour of adversity, and so forth. Talking of preaching reminds me that I must be off to prepare for to-morrow."


"Well, if I can," said Wilmot, "I'll ride over to hear you preach. I wish to know whether your style is less efflorescent than when you used to debate in the 'Union' at college."

"I shall not be afraid of you as a critic. You are not deep in theology. But come over if you can. My little church is only seven short miles from Longwoods."

The old college friends then parted, after some more conversation.

Cantering home to Longwoods on that Saturday evening, in what high spirits was cast Henry Wilmot! It seemed that his mind had caught a glimpse of fairyland. He was elated, he knew not why, or rather, perhaps, he did not choose to reflect upon the reasons. Those of us who have feeling

at all, cannot help being excited by the sight of human nature, when it is decked with youth, grace, and spirit, and decorated with the luxurious elegances that adorn wealth and station. We are so made as to be thus affected. Bright and vivid imaginings flash across our fancies as sparkling eyes attract our gaze, and a thrilling soft voice falls agreeably on our ears. When, forsooth, shall a pretty face lose its magic? We may grow old; evil may frown upon us, poverty or wretchedness may be our lot; but if our spirit has sympathy with the beautiful, we can never cease to be affected, when our path is now and again crossed by those fair phantoms of delight, that rouse again into being the memories of the lost, and make us think again of the gushing raptures of first love. Come, then, cold and heartless world! come with your frown and freezing forgetfulness of friendship, you shall not rob us of the mounting thoughts that spring from the sight of youthful womanhood with its blushing face, as it meets the eye of ardent admiration. Who made that form so fair, so softly graceful? Who pencilled those brows, clustered those locks over yonder



forehead, curved that lip into the bow of Love, and clothed all that budding form with such airy and inimitable graces? Thou, poor human artist, match it if you can—that eye, with all its flashing brightness, its glow of radiant affection, as it meets the looks of the loved one; or paint for me the heavenly rapture glowing on the face of the young mother as she clasps her man-child to her heart: and shall HE who shed such charms around His creatures, who steeped in beauty those forms which HE might have sent into life denuded of grace, shall HE not in another and more enduring scene clothe in loveliness their natures, crushed here below?

CHAPTER III.

WHILE the Mildmaye girls were riding home to their seat, their thoughts were fixed on the same subject.

"Is he not very nice-looking?" said Caroline.

"Who?" cried Louisa, with an air of ignorance.

"Mr. Wilmot," answered Caroline.

"Yes," said Louisa, "there certainly is something very agreeable and insinuating in his manner, but I do not think him handsome."

"Oh, he is not so handsome as cousin Eustace, certainly; but, then, very few have such features and face as Eustace."

"There is too much sharpness in his face, after all," said Louisa; "he has the

look of a professional person, of one whose mind is at work. I like the serenity that sits on the countenance of cousin Eustace better."

Now no one could have guessed from this conversation that the appearance of Wilmot had produced so much effect upon the Mildmaye girls as it had done in reality. Nor could one have guessed that, in point of fact, the handsome face of Eustace Mildmaye, the young clergyman, had made a deeper impression on Caroline than upon Louisa: the latter spoke with more admiration of her cousin's beauty, but the former felt it more.

"I hope," continued Caroline, "that Mr. Wilmot will come to the ball."

"Yes," replied her sister, "it would be a treat to have a new partner. I am wearied with dancing with the three Scarsdales, and their insipid conversation; with the silent John Deane, and the chattering Sir Thomas Osborne; with the stupid and philosophic Doctor Gillespie; with Mr. Hopwood, whose face symbolises his broad acres in their extent."

"Not forgetting Lord Latimer, the middle-aged widower, looking out for an-

other wife, with his absurd airs of second-rate *ton*; and Captain Dowling, who fancies himself another Marryat, because he wrote a nautical tale in the *Dryford Gazette*."

"And Mr. Brettel, still blushing with the honours of having been the senior wrangler five years ago. Well, of all kinds of partners, preserve me from these college dandies!"

"Why," asked Caroline, "do you except them particularly? Surely they are not more stupid, and they are more good for something, than other dandies."

"But they are a great deal more affected. They pretend to careless talent, while always at home, poring over their lexicons; they affect raptures about a new coat, like would-be Pelhams, while thinking all the while of cheapening an old Cyclopædia; they feign to be loungers, while they slave like miners; they have heads stuffed with Greek and the Differ—something calculus (whatever that may be); but their tongues can talk nothing but twaddle."


"The lawyer dandies," rejoined Caroline, "are the worst of all. Their bottled-beer briskness, which they make to pass off for champagne wit, is very displeasing, after

one has been dosed with it for a couple of nights. The military dandy is the best of all; he likes the fun and romance of life, and acts his part more naturally than his rivals."

"No, Cary, the clerical dandy is still better. Beau Brummell did very well, but if he had turned parson he would have been quite bewitching!"

"Why, girl, what things you do say! You don't mean to say that the Beau would have become the pulpit better than the ball-room?"

"Oh, depend upon it, he would have been irresistible, and invented some new way of doing up old sermons, and stiffening into strength the platitudes of modern eloquence. He would have told the story of Ruth with an epigrammatic felicity that might have made pousy old dowagers think it was the last new novel spiritualised. The wave of his cambric handkerchief would have charmed many an antiquated spinster; he would have preached such nice, crisp, sharp, and pleasant sermons, flavoured, perhaps, here and there with some orientalism of style. Oh! he would have been the prophet of fashionable




preaching. Why, Cary, do you suppose there is no foppery in the Church, as in other professions?"

"I am quite sure that if there be—and no doubt there is some, that it is far more odious and contemptible than any other kind of foppery."

"Be it so; but the foppish parsons for me against any other kind of fops. Their foppery, to me, is very amusing, for its comedy is thrown into high relief by the gravity of their profession. Talk of military fops, and their love of tailoring and fine clothes, what is it to the absurdity of one like our friend Parson Humphreys, who preaches salvation, and is only profoundly intent on his personal appearance! He talks of the Faith while thinking of his frock-coat, meditates on the smallness of his congregation and of his own hands, and contemplates a notorious free-liver and a speck upon his own linen with equal looks of horror."

"You are too bad, Louisa; you cut up clergymen with that pleasant satirical tongue of yours, in a way that would make a person who did not know you as well as I do, think you guilty of irreverence."



“Scoffing at sacred things is the last vice that I would tolerate. I hate scoffers, for they shock the heart of humanity, but clergymen, at least in our Protestant Church, are not sacred beings, though they claim a divine mission. The impostors amongst them deserve more severe exposure than the scamps of other professions; but so far from not respecting clergymen, I can tell you that the very man for me to elope with would be a clergyman. I feel that a gloriously eloquent preacher of charity sermons would be just the sort of bridegroom that I'd like to be rattling off to Gretna Green with in a railway *coupé*.”

“Now you are not serious; any one may see the jokes in that eye.”

“Indeed, I am quite serious; the black coat against the red any day! Dear me, what an extraordinary face!”

The exclamation was drawn from her by the sight of a pale-faced man, with dark eyes and bushy whiskers. He had a half-foreign look about him. He was standing on a low wall, and, while the horses of the carriage walked up a short hill, the stranger stared leisurely at both the Mildmayes.

"It is like the face of one of the gipseys we saw near Penshurst," said Louisa.

"What eyes he had! and what a ghastly colour!" said Caroline. "He seems all alone. I should like to know is there anything curious about him. But here we are at home."

The carriage wheeled into a handsome avenue, which wound round a small park, until it came to a small and old-fashioned mansion, with tall roof and high chimneys. There was at some distance from the house a large square pond, upon which were three or four swans floating, and between the artificial water and the gravelled space before the door the turf was shaven closely. On either side of the house was a quaint and formal garden, with box hedges and yew-trees. Boxgrove appeared like a country seat of Queen Anne's day, but it also looked like what it was, one of the most comfortable seats in all Kent. It had originally been built by an eminent judge of the days of Walpole, from whose descendants it had been purchased by its present owner.

Mr. Mildmaye was a quiet and rather reserved man, emphatically a gentleman

in his appearance and manners, shrewd, sensible, and keen, with a very extensive knowledge of life, and possessing great energy of mind. He had inherited but a small landed property, but when about forty years of age he had been bequeathed a considerable sum of money in the funds. This legacy came from an attached old schoolfellow, Alderman Cradock, who dying without issue or near kindred selected Mr. Mildmaye as his heir. Mr. Mildmaye, as executor, wound up the affairs of his deceased friend, gave the business-connexion over to the confidential clerk, Tom Lawson, but continued to turn the same Tom Lawson to considerable account by using him as a go-between in various speculations in which it was never supposed that Mr. Mildmaye was concerned. The world prospered with him upon the whole, though he grieved bitterly for the loss of his wife, who was now dead many years. In his daughters' education he took the deepest interest, and being himself a man of liberal attainments, though for the most part self-educated, he was well suited for awakening and stimulating persons of their intellect and disposition. A great

part of every week was spent by him in London, from which he returned generally every Friday or Saturday, going back to "the wen" on Tuesday or Wednesday, as business called.

For the last few weeks the Mildmaye girls had thought their father unusually careworn and depressed, and they were half beginning to think that in some respects he was suffering annoyance about his affairs, but on this Saturday they were rejoiced to find their father looking in his usual health and spirits, while his cheering voice and animated manner told them that his heart was at ease.

"Ah! my girls, and so there you are," he cried, coming fondly forward from the hall, and going before the old butler to open the carriage-door. "Well, and have you been ransacking for pretty things against Wednesday night?"

"Oh, papa! we do so hope that you'll be able to stay for the ball, and that you will not go to town next week."

"Well, may be so. I have some experiments to try that will keep me here until Thursday, in any case."

"Experiments! Oh, some new species

of cart for watering turnip-fields, or a straw chopper for the farm-yard," cried Louisa.

"Or some method of improving the soup at the workhouse without raising the rates, dear papa," said Caroline.

"Ah! you're a pretty pair of rogues to be making game of your old dad," cried the kind father, giving them a kiss apiece. "No," he continued, leading them into the drawing-room, "I only wanted to see how yonder dresses would look upon the figures of certain young ladies that must quiz their papa."

"Oh, papa, papa, how beautiful!" cried Louisa, as she took up from the drawing-room table a splendid figured blue dress of the costliest material.

"Oh! dear papa," said Caroline, as she unrolled the very shade of pink that she had so longed to possess, and which she knew would become her so well, "I declare it's one of the very prettiest dresses I ever got; and your taste is so good."

"Ah! then you think my experiments are likely to succeed. But what think you of these?" he said, as he drew a small flat box from each of his side-pockets, and

opening them, displayed circlets of rare value to be worn in the hair. There were blue and silver ornaments in the one, and pink and gold in the other, and the workmanship of each was equally brilliant, *bizarre*, and uncommon. "More experiments you see!" he cried, as he fondly kissed again each of his daughters.

The Mildmayer girls felt, like women, the pleasure of getting each precious and tasteful present, but they felt, like daughters, the pure and noble pleasure of seeing their father so easy, so happy, and so playful, and their hearts trembled lightly within them, and they gave vent to their feelings of joy; and the half-merchant, half-squire enjoyed seeing their sparkling eyes and regarding their animated faces.


"And now, dears," he cried, "let us have dinner, for I'm so hungry, and I've had no luncheon, being obliged to leave town in a hurry, and my favourite old dish of beans, bacon, and chicken is to be to-day; and I must have a glass of old port, with the green seal, as I hear the Dryford news from you both."

The Mildmayer girls skipped up the stairs nimbly to their dressing-rooms,

energetically pulling their bells and ringing up their maids in double-quick time, to get them ready for dinner without delay.

They were soon down; and how gratified was the father, as he saw their youthful loveliness arrayed in maidenly simplicity. Caroline reminded him always of her mother, and in some respects he was softer in his demeanour towards her than to her younger sister. Perhaps it must be confessed that he loved her more than his other daughter, as she recalled to him the days of his courtship and gratified husband's love; but, upon the other hand, when he looked at Louisa's face, and saw in her features a strong resemblance to himself and to his forefathers, when he marked her intellectually-shaped head, and listened to her trenchant observations on what she read and saw, he was more disposed to be proud of his younger than of his elder daughter. But with the genuine feelings of a father, he never analysed strictly his sentiments towards his children.

And now the dinner-bell sounded, and with a sauntering, lackadaisical air of



jaunty gallantry the happy father gave an arm to each of his children, and marched across the large, square, old-fashioned hall, hung with portraits of English worthies, into the wainscoted dining-room. He took his place at the side of the table, while Cary sat at the head, and Louisa took the foot of the table. Then, after a short blessing from his lips, he sat down, looking the picture of happiness, with his children, his domestic comforts and his luxuries, and, greatest of all luxuries, an easy mind.

When people are happy they eat with double pleasure. Neither father nor daughters of the party were inclined to gluttony, but somehow or other they relished their dinner on that day more than generally. The soup, however, was barely touched, and the fish sent away at once.

"The beans and bacon! Ah! that's the dish!"

"Yes, papa must not be kept waiting for his old-fashioned fare." And both daughters vied with each other in seeing that their father's whim about his dish was gratified.

"Ah!" he said, "beans and bacon! it

always reminds me of when I was a boy at old Dorkinson's school, and how poor Cradock and I used on half-holidays to scamper over the hill to Farmer Hodges, and play ball in the barn with his two sons, and get a splendid mess of beans and bacon into the bargain."

And then the conversation became local, and not very interesting to those who would not care to learn about Lord Latimer sporting a new carriage; and about rumours of a new hotel being going to be built near the common, in order to oppose the Falcon, which had been for so many years the head-quarters of the Blue interest in the district; and the death of old Doctor Ledwell, who had been an invalid for four years; and sundry other matters of not the least importance to our tale.

"And Eustace, did you see him to-day?"

"Yes, papa!" said Louisa; "and he introduced us to a college friend of his—a very prepossessing-looking person."


"Humph! who may that have been?"

"Mr. Wilmot, of the —— Office," answered Caroline.


"Now staying at Longwoods with Lord Ulverston," chimed in Louisa.

"Ah!" said the father, with a shade upon his brow, "this must be a son of Jack Wilmot, the noted wit about town, an acquaintance of mine five-and-forty years ago. How the time flies! One of the very first persons to whom I was introduced, on my leaving Oxford, was poor Jack Wilmot. He was then in the Beau Brummell set, and one of the few in it who had any heart. He was one of the gayest, pleasantest fellows I ever met in the campaign of life. No number of duns could drown his laugh. He smiled in the sponging-house, and bantered the very bailiffs who arrested him. Poor—poor Jack Wilmot!"

Somehow or other the Mildmays girls took great interest in hearing their father talk about Jack Wilmot this evening. Would they have done so if they had not seen his handsome son in the afternoon? That is a question which we will not discuss; but we must record as somewhat strange, that neither of the sisters appeared to care about hearing of the sayings or doings of Lord Alvanley, or the re-



nowned Beau Brummell, with whom their father had often played whist, and in whose company he had often sojourned at Lord Oldborough's. They were minute in their inquiries about old Wilmot, and took great interest in hearing of his imprudent marriage with the pretty young widow of a Major Wallis, shot through the heart in the very commencement of the battle of Talavera; how she had neither fortune nor jointure beyond the widow's pension—how she was the daughter of an eminent controversialist, whose Whig politics prevented his promotion in the Church—how a younger brother of Wilmot's left her a few thousand pounds, on which she managed to send her eldest son to Cambridge, and educate his brothers, while she lived in retirement;—all these particulars were eagerly attended to by both the girls, though they did not at all allow it to be supposed that the matter was so *very* interesting to them; and when at night they retired to their separate couches, after their father had spent nearly all the evening in recording various particulars of his early days, it was not a little singular that the idea of



Mr. Wilmot, the son of the noted wit, was uppermost in both their heads ; and each thought whether there was any chance of their meeting him before the ball, and whether he would be at the Dryford assembly as he had said.

CHAPTER IV.

ON the next day the Boxgrove family went as usual to the secluded country church, about three miles from them, where their cousin Eustace Mildmaye officiated. The church at Somerleigh did not hold more than about two hundred persons. It was old and picturesquely decayed, and was a pretty specimen of those churches that seem almost as old as Christianity itself. Only two or three families of consideration, besides the Mildmayes, attended it.

Service had been going on for about a quarter of an hour, when Caroline Mildmaye heard a slight bustle, and the opening of a pew-door at the opposite side of the little church. She did not turn her head to see who was the party late for service, a piece of carelessness against which Eu-

stage had so often spoken from the pulpit. Louisa did not even observe the noise at all, and was apparently unconscious that any one had come in. Her face wore at that particular moment a serenely calm and rapt expression of devotion, and her eyes were turned to the old painted glass window, of which the sun was bringing forth the mellow colours. At that very instant the face of Louisa was, without her knowing it, scanned with the greatest interest by the stranger to the congregation, who felt at the time that he had never before seen any expression on a woman's countenance so very beautiful as the religious elevation on the face of Louisa Mildmaye.

Mr. Mildmaye had soon observed the stranger; and the fact of her father's looking in that particular direction drew the attention of Caroline, who at once recognised Mr. Wilmot, of whom they had all been speaking the night before, and of whom both the girls had been thinking more than was wont with them in the case of total strangers. There he was, with his high-bred, fashionable air, his keen and searching countenance, his high and hand-

some forehead, looking, perhaps, more interesting from a certain air of lassitude, as if his mind was somewhat fatigued. His eyes met those of Caroline, who at once dropped them on her book. It was not until some minutes after that Louisa observed him; and whether unconsciously or not, her eyes rested on his handsome and prepossessing face longer than did those of her sister.

"They're a charming pair of girls," thought Wilmot to himself; "I long to know more of them. Yesterday I preferred the dark sister, to-day I like the fair one better; but I have not yet seen them in a room with their bonnets off. When I see them on next Wednesday night I can decide which of them is the best. At present I vote for those magnificent hazel eyes. I hope their father will ask me to luncheon."

His thoughts about the two girls were, however, interrupted by his recollection of the place where he was; for though Wilmot was no very straitlaced character, and had his own share of follies and faults to account for, being far from a perfect character, he was guiltless of the offence

of entering a church without any intention of raising the mind to religious duty and worship of his Maker. Just before the sermon began, while a psalm was being sung, he took a good stare at the Mild-maye girls, and the tones of Caroline's voice, raised in the service, came across the little church, reminding him of her lute-like tones in conversation.

But these considerations vanished from his mind as he saw his old college friend mount the pulpit, and as Wilmot's anxiety to know whether the efflorescent style of the young clergyman had been pruned down to less luxuriant metaphors. The sermon was on the flight of time, and on the importance of using well the period allotted to us. It more than once made Wilmot smile, ever so slightly, as he caught the mannerism of his old friend, and observed certain peculiarities of rhetorical structure that had attracted the notice of the young critics of the "Union" debating society at the University. Triads of tautological epithets still flanked weak and inexpressive noun substantives, like powdered lacqueys in full trim stalking after some feeble and worthless fellow-

mortals. Then again Wilmot observed the frequent interrogations and the answering of them—the rhetorical trick of giving vivacity to didactic composition carried so far as to lose its efficacy by its constant recurrence. Here and there were some very pretty and graceful passages of declamatory sentimentalism, which were not unpleasing to Wilmot's taste, because he knew that they were natural to the heart of the preacher, though they bordered too much on the "*O toi!*" style of French composition. Now and again Wilmot's practised intellect and retentive memory enabled him to track his old friend putting a sonnet of Wordsworth with great effect into prose, and expanding some pregnant aphorisms of Edmund Burke with some skill. "He'll do!" thought Wilmot to himself. "Some of this would go down right well with a city audience, or a large congregation. He is still too sentimental, though, but how much his voice has improved. It sounds quite differently from the perfectness of his modulation. I must find out who taught him the art of uttering his words with so much distinctness.

His gesture, too, is subdued and graceful."

And now service was over. The faces, lately so serious, became worldly and relaxed again. Farmer Dawsworth woke up from his slumber, in which he was dreaming that Squire Mildmaye had been galloping across his bean-fields, and the farmer's daughters, Polly and Sally, were all anxious to see the new dresses upon the Miss Mildmayes, and to have a good look at them both as they tripped into the carriage. Miss Lucy Bemworth, who had been to school at Bath, and had often seen the Mildmaye girls, then wished also to have an opportunity of criticising their new bonnets, whose qualities she observed and pronounced upon with more severity than Mr. Wilmot did on his friend's discourse in the pulpit.

"They were not the thing at all. They were," thought Miss Bemworth to herself, "made-up things like their wearers—very expensive and very showy, but merely made-up things. Lady Higgins would never admire them, and Lady Higgins was a judge of all that was elegant," &c. &c.

"Who is the stranger?" said Mr. Mildmaye to his daughter Cary.

"That is Mr. Wilmot, papa," answered his daughter.

"I wonder," thought Louisa to herself, "will he certainly come to the ball."

"If he has come over to dine with Eustace, I'll ask them to dine with me instead—I should like to know him," said Mr. Mildmaye. "Heigho! how like his poor father he is in the expression of his face, though his features do not resemble Jack Wilmot much."

Wilmot looked over to the Mildmaye girls, but he did not seek for a recognition until they were out of the church, when he was close to them. As the Mildmaye party rose to leave the church, the persons between the pew where Wilmot was still seated, glancing at the old walls and curious monuments of the church, drew back courteously to allow precedence to the Mildmaye girls, who were generally popular through the neighbourhood. Their doing so effectually prevented Wilmot from addressing the Mildmayes just then, even if he had been so inclined. He had not

quite arrived at the church-door when he saw Mr. Mildmaye standing by himself, evidently waiting for some one coming out; and as Wilmot appeared outside, Mr. Mildmaye came forward with the easy courtesy that so well became him, saying, in his frank, cheery voice,

“Mr. Wilmot, as an old friend of your father’s, I am very happy to see you in this neighbourhood. My daughters, whom I think you met yesterday, have just told me your name, and your father, poor fellow, if he had lived, would long ere this have made you acquainted with George Mildmaye, of Boxgrove.”

“Mr. Mildmaye,” returned Harry Wilmot, “I am indeed very happy in making your acquaintance. I rode over to hear your kinsman, my good friend, preach, and right well he does. But you have left the Miss Mildmayes by themselves.”

The girls were standing together on the grass-plot before the church, talking with each other, if the truth must be told, as to the propriety of asking any persons to meet Mr. Wilmot, in case he should accept their papa’s invitation, and remain to dine with them. Now it was strange that both the

girls almost at the same moment raised the question as to inviting other guests to meet him, though each of them in her heart hoped to have him by himself, or only with cousin Eustace, in order to have better opportunity of deciding whether he was really so interesting and agreeable a person as he seemed.

As Wilmot raised his hat in saluting the Mildmaye girls, their father pronounced their names again, and Wilmot now was better able than before to associate the name Louisa with the youngest of the two sisters. He really felt very great pleasure in meeting them; and when we are pleased the face tells the fact beyond all the art of acting or skill of the most perfect simulator. Wilmot never looked better in his life than when he gracefully advanced to address the Mildmayes.

"I did not," he cried, "expect so soon to have the pleasure of again meeting. I drove over from Longwoods to hear your cousin tell us the best way of going to heaven."

And the Mildmayes felt that the speaker looked very ingratiating as he said this, although there was nothing particular in what he said; yet there was a careless, easy

grace of manner, a friendliness of tone without the least familiarity, that was most pleasing, and both the sisters felt that there was something about their new acquaintance that interested them very much, and made them both hope that they would see a great deal more of him.

"I am afraid," said Louisa, in her sharp and rather high key, "that my cousin Eustace, like other clergymen, is better able to show us the road there than to make us follow it." And she laughed archly.

"I don't know," said Wilmot, "but he showed the way there to-day with so many pretty flowers of eloquence, that he would coax any one to follow him."

"The road to Boxgrove lies this way, Mr. Wilmot," said Mr. Mildmayer, "and, not to speak profanely, I trust you will find it a pleasant one."

"I am quite sure," said Wilmot, laughing, but with a half-sentimental air, "that it must very much resemble the road that we were hearing of to-day." And he looked at the Mildmayes.

"I trust," said Mr. Mildmayer, "that

you will waive ceremony, and kindly dine with an old friend of your father's."

"I should be most delighted to do it," said Wilmot, "but Lord Ulverston comes down to-night from town, and I cannot be out of the way. By-the-by, ladies, I was talking last night to Lady Ulverston, and she intends driving over to your ball on Wednesday night."

"How delightful!" cried Louisa. And her face beamed with pleasure.

"It is very condescending indeed in Lady Ulverston," said Caroline.

A nice ball in prospect, a new partner for a waltz or quadrille before them, and the prospect of their gaieties being countenanced by the high leader of the fashion—Lady Ulverston—was enough to make the Mildmaye girls feel greatly pleased. Their father also liked to hear that Lady Ulverston would be so neighbourly as to join in the gaiety of the gentry about Dryford, for in general she confined her society to two or three great families within an easy distance of Longwoods.

"Do change your mind, Mr. Wilmot," said he, "and dine with us to-day. Seeing

you makes me young again, and carries me back over many years."

"I should be delighted, but it is not in my power," answered Wilmot.

"Perhaps," cried Caroline, "Mr. Wilmot would come over to luncheon with us."

"I will be most happy to do so," cried Wilmot. "Here is your cousin."

The party was soon arranged for Boxgrove. But just as they were about to set out, a breathless messenger came running into the churchyard in search of Eustace Mildmaye.


"Lady Rockforest was again taken ill—at her lodgings at Beech Cottage—in the agonies of death—wished to see Mr. Mildmaye particularly."

All eyes were turned towards Eustace, whose face immediately became very grave, as he prepared to obey the summons; and then the whisper went round the churchyard that the young clergyman had been sent for about midnight by the peeress, and his housekeeper, on her way out of church, told the two Mildmayes that "Mr. Eustace had been all night with Lady Rockforest, praying with her, and

that he had not returned home till very late in the morning."

There was nothing else for Eustace but to attend to the summons. Accordingly, Wilmot, without the curate, returned with the Mildmayes. Both girls were in a charming flow of spirits, and Mr. Mildmaye thought of old times again as he looked at Wilmot.

And the latter was greatly pleased with the sight of Boxgrove itself, of whose attractions as a nice, well kept up old place, he had heard the night before from Lady Ulverston. The old-fashioned house, the square pond, the antique and formal old gardens, the trees around disposed so as to group into the general effect, struck Wilmot forcibly; and the look of the house inside, its quiet luxury, its well-toned richness of ornament, pleased him still more. The old drawing-room, with a side of it lined with books—for the library, as he learned, was too small, and barely answered for Mr. Mildmaye's wants—its furniture in the best style of a past school, with its four or five George Morlands, its "Morning" by Barrett, and its "Evening" by Wilson, had much interest for him.



"They are both Wilsons," he cried, looking at the landscapes. "That 'Morning' is very beautiful."


"No!" cried Caroline, "that is one of Barrett's, an artist of the last century; his works are often confounded with Wilson's, and no wonder, they are so like. Do you like paintings, Mr. Wilmot?"

And then the conversation turned on picture-talk, where we shall not follow it, and from that it went to landscapes, and the great country-seats of the county; and Wilmot said that he heard Catesby Court was well worth seeing, but he was told that no one was allowed in by the unfortunate peeress who resided there. And then he was much interested by the curious account which Mr. Mildmayer gave of Catesby Court. And leaving Wilmot to enjoy the stories of Mr. Mildmayer and the charms of his daughters' society, we shall allow him to find his way home that day by himself, and shall, in the mean time, say something from ourselves upon Catesby Court, as certain events took place there of no little importance in our narrative.

CHAPTER V.

I do not think that there is in all England, certainly not in the southern part of it, a gloomier place than Catesby Court. The house, woods, gardens, lake, the flowers in its fields and birds in its groves, seem to be under the spell of supernatural gloom. Even to a person ignorant of the dreary history of the Court itself its first look is awfully sepulchral. The place in itself is so remarkable, and it is so connected with some of the incidents in our story, that it is as well to indicate some of the particular features which characterise that most remarkable abode.

Catesby Court, or at least the woods surrounding it, could be seen plainly enough from the vicinity of Dryford, from which it lay eastward by at least fourteen



miles to the main entrance-gate of the park. It was situate in a part of the shire where the presence of a boggy soil and waste extent of dreary and ungrateful commons presented little that could tempt the agriculturist. For five or six miles around it the land was almost perfectly barren; and, as a consequence, no gentlemen's seats were in its immediate vicinage, and scarcely any enclosures that deserved the appellation of farms. The lands around were intersected merely with by-roads; and it added to the dreary seclusion of its situation that no great thoroughfare passed close to it. Seen from Dryford, or from any place within its horizon, it looked remarkable enough. The hills to the north of it rose precipitously to a considerable height, and its woods and outlying plantations stretched for nearly two miles along a jagged and broken line of country.

From any side, the approach to it was dreary. Bad roads, few passengers, uncultivated lands were no unfitting introduction to the internal solitudes—not without a strong dash of the sublime—that presented themselves to the intruder who explored the long-neglected grounds of

Catesby Court. For nearly two miles before approaching the grand gateway not a single house of any kind presented itself to the traveller, who, on arriving at the chief entrance-lodge, found that the demesne itself was surrounded by lofty stone walls, coarsely put together, and in some places covered with ivy, while the coping of them was broken and neglected, not to such an extent, however, as to interfere with the apparent security of their enclosure. The entrance consisted of a considerable semicircular sweep, which once, apparently, had been kept in order, but which was then completely overgrown with weeds and brambles, save where the defined marks of wheels along the walks indicated the tracks by which carriages approached the gateway. The latter rose from the ground to the height of nearly forty feet, and had a most singular effect. It was a lofty wall, out of which was scooped a pointed archway, similar to what are observed in conventual buildings. An old-fashioned iron gate, rusty and unpainted, with the cypher of "C" and a viscount's coronet interlaced in the iron-work, enabled a person to see for nearly

three-quarters of a mile along the main avenue. On entering through the gate, the entrance-road appeared to have been designed after the examples of those long and solemn-looking vistas that one sees in continental forests. Whoever has travelled the road between Brussels and Waterloo cannot fail to have been struck with the wood of Ardennes, and the grand avenue up to Catesby Court was like a mile of the dreariest part of the wood mentioned. The avenue ran from west to east; on the left, the ground rose steeply towards the north, and was covered with a thick wood of beeches, while on the right large and gloomy groves of funereal pines spread far and far away. The light seemed to struggle in vain through their closely-matted tops overhead, while their grim, gaunt stems rose sternly from the brown ground underneath, in which no verdure met the eye. Between the woods and what had been the carriage-way in the centre there might have been at either side some dozen yards of grass. Nor can it be denied, that as one stood in the great gateway and looked up that long avenue, and heard the wind moaning through the

forest at either side, that the effect had much that was grand and awe-inspiring. The length of the carriage-way, the darkness and depth of the timbered grounds, and the loneliness of all around, filled the mind with sensations of a solemn and most gloomy kind.

Nor were these effects diminished in advancing towards the end of the great avenue. On the contrary, the dreary air of funereal solemnity increased at every step. About three-quarters of a mile from the grand gateway the woods upon the left terminated, and sloped off gradually towards the hills upon the north. These hills seemed to swell into a sort of amphitheatre, covered thickly with forest timber, save where an opening might be descried that appeared to lead straight towards the north. A great flat space of about three hundred acres was free from wood, but of this at least sixty acres were occupied with a lake, which, so far from adding brightness to the scene, by the blackness of its waters increased the sombreness, while it imparted something of a dreary variety to the view. Its banks showed that the soil was peat-moss, and

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it was of extreme depth, having been originally formed by nature, and afterwards augmented by art. Surrounded by woods that cast their shadows upon its waters, from which dark vapours exhaled, without swans or ornamental fowl floating on its ebony-coloured surface, it well deserved its traditional name of "The Black Pool," by which it had been known for two centuries, since one of the Lord Catesbys, in the time of Charles the First, had caused his adulterous wife and her illicit offspring to be drowned in its gloomy waters. Local popular legends were rife as to certain ghostly visitations of the deceased guilty one; and old people of the peasant class were to be found who affirmed that the fish of the lake was poisonous, and not fit for human food. These assertions were to a certain extent corroborated by the unquestionable fact that the carp and perch in its waters were the reverse of tempting in their flavour, possibly from some peculiar chemical elements in the basin of the lake. It added, also, to the gloomy effects of those dark waters, that a female skeleton (supposed to be that of the murdered Lady Catesby) had, some eighty

years ago, been fished up by "the wicked Lord Catesby," who in a few years afterwards was himself drowned in its waters while boating on a summer evening.

On advancing about thirty yards forward, the avenue diverged towards the right, and disclosed the great view of Catesby Court. Externally it presented a monotonously uniform aspect to the eye, although, in point of fact, it had been built at various periods, and was in its internal arrangements one of the most confused and intricate mansions in the kingdom. The place upon which it stood had been originally a Roman station, and it had been called Salencester; but while the estate was in the possession of the Thoresbys it was named Thoresby Hall, and there were some monastic ruins in a portion of the demesne. In one of the rooms of the mansion was a curious drawing of the "Hall," as it was then called, *temp.* 1584, by which it appeared that the building had been since greatly increased. It was a castellated mansion in the seventeenth century, and had stood a fortnight's siege from the Parliamentary troopers; and the enormous thickness of its walls well fitted

it for obstinate resistance but for the place being commanded from the adjacent hill.

After his return from Italy, Lord Catesby "the traveller" (author of the two ponderous quartos still to be met with in the libraries of old country houses, entitled "Travels in Spain and Portugal, Italy and Austria, by Lord Viscount Catesby"), in order to display his acquired taste, applied himself to improving the old hall, or castle. He added to it another story, and increased the length of the main edifice. It was three stories in height from the ground before, and with some degree of architectural invention he produced considerable effect, by making the hall-door open from what had been the second story previously, and building up to it a double flight of steps, which had a truly palatial effect. The house, therefore, presented an imposing *façade* of twelve windows in length; and its shape, though still too like a barrack or a great hospital, was in some respects rather classical and Italianised. To the right and left he brought out wings, which advanced from the main edifice in a crescent form, to the length

each of sixty feet, and justified the appellation of "Court," with which he rebaptized the old hall. To the right of the house he constructed a vast terrace, approached by a flight of steps, forty feet in width, and a stone balustrade ran along the terrace to the length of three hundred yards.

As one stood upon the summit of the steps that led to the hall-door, the view towards the north resembled the long avenue before described, except that there was no carriage-way through the green vista that led to the summit of the hills in an unbroken line. The view appeared to be terminated by a pillar in the grounds of Catesby Court; but such was not the case. There stood a single pillar in the great wood of the adjoining estate of Topcliffe, and which had originally been placed there as a landmark and a guide to the foresters. Some twenty feet had been struck off of it by lightning, but it had still considerable height, and added much to the view from Catesby Court.

To the back of the house, and rising closely from its rear, was a curiously-shaped conical hill, which probably rose

to the height of four hundred feet, and which was covered thickly to the summit with a dense grove of pines. Its form was almost as sharply defined as if an engineer had raised it up after triangular mensuration. It cast its dark shadows over that which looked gloomy enough before, and to a stranger looking down on that place from the height towards the north, not the least striking thing was the great pine pyramid, which seemed to aspire with monumental grandeur, as if it were a great natural tomb erected for the commemoration of some black deeds that might, perchance, have been committed in its vicinage.

Such were the chief features of Catesby Court; but a mere passing sight of it did not realise all its dreariness of effect. The atmosphere that hung over it was humid and unwholesome; even the best portions of its lands had a clayey bottom, which retained the water like a sponge; cold dank vapours exhaled from its lake of gloom; the sunbeams were excluded by the thick woods and by the pyramid of pines to the rear; and when the wind played from the north or the east, it

howled along either of the two vistas, which served as mighty funnels through which it swept with rushing power.

The two wings of the mansion, constructed of frail materials and built only for show, had decayed. But the main body of the house, built of ragstone, was quite sound. The roof, as well as the slightly-built addition of the upper story, had also much decayed, and the damp of the site had covered the upper porticos with a green moss, from which the water oozed down the front, and gradually gave a blackish tint to a colour which was originally of an iron grey.

We never saw but one place that had ever been the seat of high-born residents with large fortunes, that at all approached Catesby Court in its awful aspect of funereal gloom, and in its almost supernatural air of blackest desolation. We once sojourned at the residence of the late Hungarian Baron S——zski, on the borders of what we may call "Austrian Poland." His grandsire, when exiled by Maria Theresa, had spent a vast fortune in constructing a place not very dissimilar from Catesby Court; but even H——berg

had a due eastern aspect, and the morning radiance of the great luminary beamed over its desolate hills; nor, like Catesby Court, was H——berg built in a pit from which ventilation was almost excluded; and besides, large retinues of servants and brilliant uniforms sparkled over the scene. Nor were there any traditions of criminality, any memories of black deeds associated with its dreary and repulsive-looking walls. The last week of Lent spent at H——berg, even with all the rigidity of Roman Catholic austerity, would be more cheerful and less depressing than the Christmas holidays, if spent at Catesby Court.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was the Tuesday after the Sunday on which the Mildmayes and Mrs. Wilmot had met at church, that the owner of Catesby Court was seated in the blue drawing-room of her melancholy abode. The countenance of Lady Rockforest was one never to be forgotten by those who saw her in advanced years, and she might have been considerably past fifty. She had still about her the traces of that beauty which had made her a celebrity in fashionable life at an early period of her sadly eventful career, ere she had tarnished her reputation with errors, for which she was to suffer to the very end of her days. The eyes were lustrously black, and the skin was remarkably fair. The countenance was pallid with mental trouble and illness, and those

who are experienced in the study of physiognomy might trace the lines of mental anguish upon that worn face, still handsome even in her decay. The lips were thin and colourless, the teeth still were perfect, and ever and anon the tip of her tongue slid serpent-like out of her mouth. Her hair had once been raven black, and was now the most melancholy point in all her person. She had still a quantity of it, and wore it without a cap; but it was grizzled and half white, though its original colour was here and there discernible, and it gave her head a most startling aspect, and enhanced the painful effect produced by gazing on that handsome, haggard face, with its look of vindictive temper, passionate character, and tortured self-communing. Oh! the study of that face of Lady Rockforest was in itself an awful moral lesson.

Reader, I will not dwell upon her stained life, nor recount the errors of her sad career. She, too, once, had not been more wilful than either of the Mildmayes. Once she was virtuous and respected, and the Honourable Margaret Pendarves had begun life with the fairest prospects.

Faithless to her first husband, Sir Arthur Tucker, she married her seducer, the late Lord Rockforest, who had left her the dreary residence of Catesby Court, with a rental of two thousand a year. His son, the present Lord Rockforest, had not been reared under her control, and maintained no intercourse with her. Her life, subsequent to her second husband's death, was stained with errors committed, it is only charitable to suppose, when her judgment had actually given way, and when she was goaded on by the fury of passions lashed into madness by agonising anguish. She had sought refuge from the "still small voice," not where alone it can be found in penitent privacy and the solemn duties of religion, but in riotous living, when, with the reckless of one sex and the ruined of the other, she vainly tried to hide her inward torture and brazen out her known shame. Alas! hers, indeed, was a terrible fate. Wearied of such society only as she could command, and superior by her talents and accomplishments to the persons with whom she herded for five miserable years, she withdrew from the scene of passion and tur-

moil, and tugged her guilty fetters round the dreary seclusion of Catesby Court. Round and round its dark and dismal groves she would ramble every day, muttering to herself, or lost in vague reverie. Her intellect was highly vigorous, and might have given her pleasure in its exercise, but her passions were so violent, and her blasts of gloomy temper so sudden and capricious, that she could not enjoy the composure necessary for mental pleasures, and yet there was in that finely-chiselled brow, that well-arched forehead, and the gleaming, deep-set eyes, something that told of power, and suggested a being of genius.


Thus, like one already doomed, she gnashed at her chains, and vainly paced her dungeon. She recoiled from death, and saw its gradual approach with horror. Never trembling in the presence of any human thing, she shrank from the bourne beyond the grave. "Devil that I am!" she would say to herself at times, "must I be ever miserable? Is there no means of bettering my lot?" And then she would scowl like a hideous apparition, the last few traces of departing beauty

would shrivel in her fleshless face, the thin, sharp lines of guilt and suffering would be contorted in her countenance, the hands would clench, the teeth audibly grind, and with a harsh, hoarse voice, those thin, miserable lips would blasphemously swear!

She had for some time paced up and down the blue drawing-room, but she was not thinking of its faded and almost moth-eaten finery, or regarding its furniture, which looked old enough for the age of the first of the Georges.

"I wonder whether Mr. Mildmaye will come again to-day?" How many thoughts arise as I see him! Don't I recollect his kinsman, Sir Oswald, when we were both thirty years younger? I like his looks—yes, that I do! But what of that? What have I to do with looks? I have had enough of deception and base ingratitude in my time!"

And she burst into a paroxysm, but it did not long continue. From her window she caught a sight of the messenger with the post-bag, and the approach of one of her few pleasures distracted her attention for the moment. The letters and papers



were soon lying before her. She snatched up two of them.

“Ah! here is one from Kate Jobson. She will tell me about what they are doing at Lord Fernley’s at the Abbey. And here is one from Carruthers, now Lady Jephson’s waiting-woman, and the best-informed of all my gossips. Ha! ha! ha! a good idea of mine, to salary a set of female correspondents in half a dozen of the great houses of the land. I manage to cheat the fashionable world after all, and I do know what is going on behind the scenes. I declare, too, they both seem very long letters, well stuffed with news. I must send Carruthers some money to-morrow. She’s one of the very best of all my secret police. Pity that Fouché did not flourish in my latter days! We would have been of great use to each other.”

Lady Rockforest had soon found, after taking up her abode at Catesby Court, that even with large wages she could not keep many of her waiting-women. They used always to find an excuse for leaving her service, and some of them would frankly confess that their spirits and health gave way in its dreary solitude.

Their relinquishment of her service had for a time rankled in her heart, until her ingenuity found a mode of turning them to account, and she accordingly bargained with some of them for letters describing what they saw in the service of the various families where they lived, and for repeating the tittle-tattle of the servants' hall. Little did some eminent families know that they were giving shelter to gossiping spies, who sold for gain the tattle of their household. But so it was ; and the subsequent confessions of more than one of the parties have placed the matter beyond dispute. It is almost incredible with what avidity Lady Rockforest would gloat over those revelations of her ex-waiting-maids. Whenever she read in the *Morning Post* of a great party assembled in some country-house, where one of her "police" was fixed, she would be sure to send a note intimating her desire to hear all about it. She used never to sign the note with any name, and she used even to disguise her handwriting. But she was so prompt and liberal in paying for information and tattle, that in most instances her spies anticipated her wishes.

I fear that the knowledge, or the falsehoods, so obtained by this wicked and unhappy woman, were put to the worst account. I fear that there are only too good grounds for believing that in past years she fed some of the extinct Sunday papers with a stream of malicious and backbiting gossip, that gave to others some of that secret pain and suffering under which she herself writhed for five-and-twenty years.

“Ha!” she cried, taking up the *Morning Post*, “‘Lady Truckleborough’s Archery Fête at Greenvale.’ So! Baker must send me an account of that. Who were at it? ’Twas a canvassing party, I suppose, to ingratiate her son with the grocers and haberdashers of Torkington. A long list of names. I’ll scan them by-and-by. Ah! ah! ‘*Soirée Dansante* at Dowager Lady Wrinklethorpe’s.’ And so Mrs. Reeves managed to be there; and, my stars! only think of that semi-demi-black sheep in petticoats, Lady Hedges, being at it! Bess Robinson’s last letter gave me a fact about Hedges that she and others shall hear of again. A touch of the *Sunday Scourge* will do her immense service. Nothing like the Diffusion of Useful

Knowledge! Ha! ha! And here's a dinner-party at Sir Hartopp Rowlington's, with all the Tracy family at it. It will be as well to remind the world what happened to Miss Tracy twenty years ago. Perhaps the pious Lady Rowlington does not know of it. Her ignorance must be enlightened. And what's this about Sir Oswald Mildmaye? Oh! he has taken a house at the south side of Grosvenor-square. I recollect his old grandfather having a house at the west side of it. Ah! that was when Mary St. Pierre—(Mrs. Mildmaye, of Boxgrove, afterwards)—curses on her name!—yes, when that bitter enemy of mine used to drive out with me in my phaeton and cream-coloured ponies! Sir Oswald has a fine property. I wonder what he is going to law about? Wasn't there something in Sally Walcot's last letter about what Mr. Wyndham's gentleman told her? Ha! what's that?"

A double knock—a thing rarely heard at Catesby Court—sounded through the house. It was Eustace Mildmaye, whose slow riding up the avenue had not been heeded by the occupied mind of Lady Rockforest, as she eagerly scanned the

Morning Post, and commented on its contents.

"The Reverend Mr. Mildmayer," said a grim-looking, sallow-faced servant-woman, opening the door of the blue drawing-room.

"Mr. Mildmayer, you quite startled me with your knock. Dear me, how like the Mildmayes you are! I should know you anywhere for one of the family. Sit down; and I'm so glad to see you."

"I trust that your health is better, Lady Rockforest," said the young clergyman, with mild courtesy, but yet preserving a certain formal reserve, as if he by no means desired a very intimate acquaintance with Lady Rockforest.

"Thank you, it is! I really got a sad fright, and have been much shaken in consequence—I thought I was actually dying. And, O God! Mr. Mildmayer, no wonder, after what I told you, I am horribly afraid of dying."

Before he could answer at all to her, Lady Rockforest rose rapidly from her chair, and strode up to the young clergyman's side, and in a hoarse voice cried, while she grasped his shoulder with her

white skinny hand, and her eyes glared with lurid light,

"Now, mark me, young man! Ah! you look half frightened at my face, and you're not the first whose cheek I have made blanch. By ——, if you reveal to a mortal person what I told to you the other night, when I thought I was going to eternity, I'll——"

The face shrank, the lips shut, the brow was knit—one step back she strode, and like some menacing demon, with an appalling intensity of rage stamped upon her face, raising her right arm she shook it with terribly significant gesture at the young clergyman, who felt, as he gazed upon the dreadful woman before him, that he had, indeed, contracted a heavy responsibility in being the clerical depository of some of the secrets of her conscience.

"Madam, I can assure you," commenced Eustace Mildmaye, "as a clergyman and gentleman, I am incapable of betraying——"

"What's that?—who's there?" cried Lady Rockforest, starting up with nervous anxiety, as the door opened, and in came the servant with a tray of refreshments, that

Lady Rockforest had forgotten she ordered to be brought on Mr. Mildmaye's arrival. "Set them down on that walnut-table, Peterson," she cried, "and remove that ladder from the curtains; it is not a fit ornament for a drawing-room."

The woman went to remove, as she was told, a ladder that had been employed in some arrangement of the window-poles, when, by some awkwardness, she struck a large mirror, whose fastenings in the wall were not very secure, and with a tremendous crash down came the mirror and broke into fragments on the drawing-room floor.

"Well done, Peterson," she said, with bitter irony; "if I had asked you to do that to oblige me, you would have forgotten it for a week. Well, if there's anything on earth I hate, 'tis——" she paused, looked at Peterson, then at the curate, and added—" 'tis an awkward servant."

"Come into another room, Mr. Mildmaye," she continued—"come out of this apartment." And she herself, with a hasty pace that somewhat surprised Eustace Mildmaye when he recollected her recent illness, led the way. She passed

outside, opened a chamber, looked into it, shut the door hastily, and advanced further down the corridor. "There, this will do," she cried, entering into a room called "the saloon," and which was once meant to have been a cheerful apartment. It was fitted up in days when it was the fashion to imitate the Louis Quatorze style, but had only once been renovated. Its gilding was worn away, its hangings faded and half perished; there was a dismal elegance and chilling finery about it, in keeping with the wasting form and vanishing graces of the haughty, heart-broken being who swept into it with the air of a sovereign. When the mind is shaken with the first approaches of madness, it is remarkable that a vaunting loftiness of carriage and a haughtiness of tone are assumed by the unfortunate persons about to become victims to the most humiliating of infirmities.

"If there's anything on earth I hate," she continued, "'tis not an awkward servant, as I said to Peterson; no, Mr. Mildmaye, 'tis to see glass broken. I am terribly superstitious about breaking glass, and breaking a mirror is a shocking thing.

I am sure I'm glad that 'twas not my hands broke it, though the orders I gave about the ladder were the cause of it. And I remember what I was saying to you at the time Peterson entered the room. It strikes me as very unlucky that just when I was giving you a serious warning the glass should be broken in a minute after. There is something very significant in that."

"Lady Rockforest, I am really surprised that one of your strength of mind——"

"Come, now, Mr. Parson, none of your cut-and-dry platitudes about follies of superstition. I shudder when glass is broken before me, and I always did, and I always will, for I can't help it. Come, now, no argument about it; I know as well as you do all that can be said against superstitious folly, so spare your lecture. Well, I am very glad to see you again, Mr. Mildmaye; and I hope you will often come to see me, wicked though I am, and have been. I was just reading in the *Morning Post* that your kinsman, Sir Oswald, has taken a town mansion in Grosvenor-square. I suppose that he wants to push for a peerage; there was one long


ago in your family. Where is Sir Oswald's son?"

"Really, Lady Rockforest, I am a very bad person to ask about any of the Mildmaye Park branch of our family. We have not been on terms for many years. There is no intimacy between us."

"Oh! true—true; how could I be so stupid! But you are intimate enough with another branch—I see you often walking with your cousins, the Miss Mildmayes. What beautiful girls they are! Excuse a person like me presuming to ask after them."

Eustace Mildmaye answered her civilly enough that they were very well.

"Their mother was Mary St. Pierre," said Lady Rockforest. "Ha! I ought to hate the name of St. Pierre. There is not another name on earth I detest so much as I do that of St. Pierre. Yes! I ought to hate it. Your cousins' mother was my deadliest enemy, and she was once my friend too. I hope," she continued, "that you will never marry one of the Miss Mildmayes. Don't—I say don't—do so." She spoke with emphasis, and turned her flashing eyes on Eustace Mildmaye.



He was much surprised at the vehemence which she exhibited, but his self-respect was nettled at the familiar manner in which Lady Rockforest presumed to address him. He might not have remembered that between persons who are in each other's confidence, whether by design or accident, there often seems a closer approximation to intimacy than can take place where there is no secret understanding. There was a good deal of pride also in the whole race of the Mildmayes, and the young clergyman was not without his share of it.

"I am not used to discuss family matters, except with those of my immediate kindred," he began; "and I cannot see any reason why you, Lady Rockforest, ought to interfere about my domestic concerns, even if I were about to enter into the state of matrimony with any one—a thing that I have no present intention of doing."

"Nay! but it is every matter to me after my revelations to you. I would not for ten thousand pounds have you marry one of your Mildmaye cousins. Then, you know, I have told you what she

did to me, and how she contributed to my ruin; and sorry should I be that one of her daughters should be the wife of one who knows so much of my secret history as you do. What a fool I was to have unlocked the secrets of my bosom to you, to have divulged to you the story of my life."

"As far as I am concerned, Lady Rockforest, you shall never repent of having done so."

"But you may do so if you marry one of those Mildmaye girls—'the rival sisters,' as I hear them called. I recollect meeting you with the youngest of them—one with dark hair and eyes."

"She happens to be the eldest—Caroline."

"Well, then, it was with her I met you walking one day over the hurst at Allingham; she seemed blushing deeply, and was listening with downcast looks to your conversation. 'I spy love,' said I to myself. And I do not think, after all, it would be so strange if you were both married. You would both make a very handsome couple. Nay! you need not look so astonished. No wonder that a Mildmaye

should be handsome, and you are not degenerate. I am not going to propose an elopement with you, Mr. Mildmaye. My time for that has passed—ha! ha! so you need not seem so surprised. But, mark me, young man, if you marry Caroline Mildmaye, evil will come of it. I have a presentiment of it, and I warn you beforehand. I hate her mother, though she be in her grave. I detest her memory, and I wish evil from all my heart to the daughters that came from her womb.”

“This is language, Lady Rockforest, that I cannot stay and hear,” said Eustace Mildmaye, rising from his seat with a grave face, and taking up his hat, which he had brought into the room with him. “You shock, you horrify me, by the exhibition of such feelings. The late Mrs. Mildmaye was my relative, and I sincerely respect her memory. After what you have said about the painful nature of the injury that you believe to have suffered from her, I cannot be surprised at your feeling with bitterness. But even if she committed any fault towards you, she is now beyond the grave; her spirit has winged its flight to another world, for which it would be-

hove us all in time to prepare. I came to-day for the purpose of holding with you, according to your own desire, some religious conversation with you preparatory to the solemn act that you meditate of approaching the Lord's Supper; but I shall defer doing so till another occasion, when you are less excited."

"You shan't go from me in such a way!" cried Lady Rockforest, with energy of manner. She strode across the room and suddenly locked the door from outside, and he heard her steps receding as she hurriedly moved down the corridor.

CHAPTER VII.

THE first impression in Eustace's mind was that Lady Rockforest must be downright mad. The glitter of her eyes, the spasmodic violence of her manner, the haggard anguish of her face, the raven croaking of her voice, all showed mental disturbance. Whether it was from his peaceable profession, or from any constitutional peculiarity, Eustace Mildmaye was not one of those bold spirits who are unshaken by sudden emergencies, and there was much in his present position to make him most uncomfortable. Lady Rockforest, to ease her mind, had, with some reluctance on his part, revealed to him some dark passages in her life, which showed that while she was less criminal in some respects than the world supposed

her to be, in other parts of her conduct she was even more guilty than her enemies imagined. She was a woman, Eustace believed, capable of committing some great crimes when under the influence of her evil imaginings; and yet in her conversations and opinions there was not that downright incoherency which is supposed essential to constitute madness. He regretted then knowing so much of her secrets; and he would have given much to be released from the burden of having been her conscience-keeper. He dreaded nothing so much as being brought into some public scrape by her. "Suppose she suddenly committed suicide, and left some half-mad statement about his having been a confidant as to the state of her soul? Suppose that——" And his nervous mind conjured up the spectres of fifty scrapes that he might be brought into. He listened in silence, hoping that she might soon return, but he heard no sounds of approaching steps. The sense that he was locked in a prisoner in such a house added to the uncomfortable state of his feelings. The Catesby family had occupied it for a century, and the legends of their

race were the reverse of what is beautiful and cheerful. One of the darkest of all the criminal trials in the *causes célèbres* of England rose out of black transactions in that old house. That wicked Lord Catesby, the companion in their maddest pranks of the Whartons and St. Johns, in the early part of the last century, had within the walls of Catesby Court consummated his career of crime. "Strange," cried Eustace, "that this place should come to be inhabited by its present occupant!"

He looked out of the windows on the gloomy park at the opposite side of the lake, where black and pitchlike waters were surrounded by pines and dark green beech, whose nodding branches looked like funeral plumes waving in the wind. The long terrace stretched away to the eastward, and presented an air of desert solitude. Wild weeds grew along its walk; the ivy clambered round its balustrade. There was no sound of cheerfulness, no sight of pleasant life in the landscape which met his eye. All was deathlike and still, as if the place were engulfed by some mighty wizard.

Yet, as he cast his eyes upwards, he saw the clouds flying past in fleecy waves across the sky. There was the heaven-blue vault aloft; and the contrast appeared all the stronger from its opposition of brightness and airy ethereal grace to the awful sorrow and stern misery that seemed to hang like a pall over Catesby Court. There is something to any imaginative and susceptible mind very exciting and pleasing in skyey contemplations. We are all more affected than perhaps we are aware with these cloudy towers, these wondrous *Ruskinisms* in the air, and by the sight of the vast azure vault over our heads.


Eustace Mildmaye was a sentimentalist, and even in the midst of his uncomfortable feelings, he felt, with something like the spirit of a moralising poet, the contrast between the unnatural gloom of Catesby Court and the bright and joy-suggesting aspect of the sunny summer sky. But he did not long enjoy these contemplations. Few things give one so disagreeable a sensation as the sense of being locked into a confined space, and being deprived of liberty, even where there is no military or legal *duress* in the case. Eustace began

to find the room close, and to experience a feeling as if he could not breathe freely. He went to one of the windows to raise it, but he could not lift the sash, nor was he able to succeed better with the other windows; and the room certainly had a mouldy smell, as if it had not been aired for some time. He went to the chimney-piece, in order to ring one of the bells. One of the bell-pulls he found was dumb, and put up only for ornament, and at the first pull he tugged the other down, without even stirring the wire. As if to match the accident that had occurred in the blue drawing-room, the bell-pull, in falling, came across a tall spider-like candlestick of glass resting on the chimney-piece, and a loud crash from fifty splinters of cut-glass was the noisy result of his attempt to procure his liberation.

"Some of the servants, at least, must come now," said he, "for I certainly have made noise enough." And he sat down in a queer old three-legged arm-chair, quietly awaiting the result. He looked around the faded saloon, and the sight of it was enough to give many dreary and disagreeable ideas about lost generations,

vanished hours, and the ceaseless flight of time. The faded old carpet, whose pattern it was so difficult to trace; the quaint old chimney-piece, fashioned expensively with various marbles, put together with mosaic art; the old mirrors let into the walls, reflecting a greenish light; the grim and ghastly-looking old tables and chairs, and the French timepiece, with its hands off, while ruin was almost hourly visible in the progressive decay of the ornaments of velvet in what had once been a costly and brilliant room, filled the sensitive mind of the young clergyman with depressing thoughts.

He saw a stand of books fitted in a corner of the room, and went to examine them. They were the light reading of a century ago. There were the works of Congreve, and contemporary dramatists, splendidly bound in red morocco, and with the Catesby arms stamped upon the covers; and lying by their side were some of the Freethinkers' productions of the age of Anne and the first of the Georges. He significantly smiled as he turned over the pages of the "Old Bachelor," and found an offensive passage in it scored and an-



notated in the style of the Piazza, at a time when the notorious Lord Catesby was one of the reigning rakes amongst men of fashion. But he soon laid down this book, and going to the door, knocked at it with considerable loudness. He heard the echoes of his blows reverberating in the long corridor by which the saloon was approached, and he sat down, quietly awaiting with listening ears for some one to come. But after many minutes had elapsed he was still seated in his chair, and no one approached from outside to release him.

Again he knocked, and again the sounds died away, without awakening any attention to his wishes. He tried it again and again, and his temper was considerably ruffled and nettled at the degree of contumely which he thought had been cast upon him. But neither his anger nor his voice availed him anything, and really feeling considerable excitement, he walked up and down the room, looking out from time to time upon the dismal scene by which that great lone house was surrounded.

Once or twice he heard a distant door

shut with some noise, but it was in a remote part of the mansion, and the sounds soon died away, leaving him in the saloon, which was placed at the corner of the house at its eastern extremity. He began to feel a strange sense of something evil stealing over him, and the knowledge of Lady Rockforest's fiercely wild character, and, above all, the dispositions of her nature as stamped in tragic cyphers upon her worn and haggard features, would have made even a more resolute spirit than that of Eustace Mildmaye nervous, perplexed, and uneasy. While thus in a state of some alarm as to what might be the consequence, he thought that he heard some noise approaching up the corridor. He listened attentively, but his ears must have been deceived; yet no! he *did* hear some noise approaching. 'Twas overhead. He heard distinctly some one walking heavily on the floor above him, and then he heard a noise as if some person was descending a staircase.

He had observed, as he entered the saloon, that there was a very large door opening right opposite, and immediately adjoining the large window in the eastern

wall of the house, which gave light to the long corridor. Could the staircase and door communicate? He was all anxiety to know. Yes! the person had stopped, but it could not have been Lady Rockforest, the tread was too weighty for her slender frame.

He heard the shaking of a bunch of keys, and, listening attentively, he now heard a key turned into a lock, and the door at the opposite side of the corridor cast open, and then he heard it closed again, and locked. In a minute the key in the door of the saloon was turned, and eagerly did Eustace Mildmaye turn his eyes thither.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE came into the chamber, with a large bunch of keys in her hand, a woman of sufficiently remarkable presence. She was stout and broad in figure, and might have been about sixty years of age. Whether she was a gentlewoman, or a domestic of upper rank, did not immediately appear. Her dress was excessively fine, and was not one of the least marked facts about her, though her countenance arrested attention at once. She had a very sallow face, and might have been handsome when young, unless the excessive disfigurement produced by the singular smallness of her head operated against her personal appearance. Her skull was small enough for a girl of fourteen, and her face was, at the lower part of it, extremely wide. Her

eyes were large and lustrous, but glittered with a bad expression and furtive suspicious look, and were surmounted by large dark eyebrows. Her teeth were undecayed, and were peculiar in their sharp, long, and narrow form. There was a look of unshrinking audacity upon the whole face, and her hair, though somewhat grey, was still abundant, and was coquettishly arranged. She was dressed in a dark orange satin gown, with a large lace collar over her shoulders. There was a gold watch at her girdle; her shining black shoes had silver buckles, and her stockings were of pink silk.

Eustace Mildmaye had not seen this person before on his visits to Catesby Court, and he was anxious to know who she could be.

"You are the Reverend Mr. Mildmaye?" she commenced.

"I am," said Eustace.

She stared at him for a minute, and her piercing black eyes seemed to scrutinise his very soul.

"Lady Rockforest has sent me to you to say——"

"May I be favoured with your name?" said Eustace Mildmaye, timidly.

"Mrs. Ullathorne, a friend of Lady Rockforest. Humph! perhaps, Mr. Mildmaye, the *only* friend she has in the world." And she looked at him with an expression of suspicion and deceit.

"I should hope that Lady Rockforest is not so friendless as you represent."

"Well, we shall talk of that another day. In the mean time," she continued, "Lady Rockforest desires me to say that she is so very ill just now, that she will not be able to see you any more to-day, and yet she wants to speak to you particularly. She will see you on the day after to-morrow, with reference to something she proposes to do at another time."

"How very unfortunate!" said Eustace. "I am anxious to tell Lady Rockforest that I am about to go to London on business. I was thinking of setting out there on the day after to-morrow, and returning in about a week. But I must decline altogether to visit Lady Rockforest. Her behaviour to me this day has been disrespectful, if not to myself, certainly to

my office. I am a clergyman of the Church of England; and though no stickler about trifles, I certainly will not submit to such treatment from any person, nor such insult as Lady Rockforest has offered to me in locking me up here."

"She did not mean you any insult," said Mrs. Ullathorne. "It was only her burst of sudden passion, and you——"

"There is no necessity for explanation," said Eustace. "I shall decline to visit Lady Rockforest, after her forgetting herself so much as to show me such indignity. She must apply for spiritual assistance to another clergyman. I shall visit her no more."

Scarcely had these words been out of his mouth, than the face of Mrs. Ullathorne assumed a most ferocious expression. Her eyes seemed to dance in her head. Her countenance became lowering and ominous, and with great vehemence she cried, in tone and language that now made Eustace Mildmaye feel that the person before him was no lady,

"Why, man, what is that you say? Are you in your senses? Do you think, forsooth, after what has passed between

Lady Rockforest and yourself, that you can whistle her down the wind at that rate? What! after being her confidant—after hearing all that she did—for I suppose she told you everything—after having her conscience pumped out clean into your ears, Mr. Parson, to propose turning over to some other gentleman in black, and let her rave away again into his ears as she did into yours, at the time that she thought that she was going to make her last leap in the dark! Pooh! man—you little know the mess you have put yourself in by being a confidant of Lady Rockforest! She never would have sent for you—or the like of you—if I had been by her side on the night that she got the fit at Dryford.”

“I shan’t submit to such impertinent language,” said the curate. “I am astonished at your boldness in presuming to address me so!”

He turned on his heel, and walked over to the window to get his hat, and had just taken it up, when he heard the door bang-to. He wheeled round. The key from outside turned in the lock—and Mrs. Ul-lathorne was gone!


It was the work of a moment, but Eustace Mildmaye was completely disconcerted by the surprise. With open eyes he stared at the door, and stood still in the middle of the room. He then heard a voice outside the door. It was Ullathorne's.

"You will have to come down from your high horse, Mr. Mildmaye—you must give up such tantarums. Wait until I'm in again with you."

He heard her steps go down the corridor, and thence to a pair of cross folding-doors, locking them also; he heard her return, and unlock the opposite great door, then close it and re-lock it; tramp, tramp, he heard her ascend the staircase, slowly, and when she reached the top, he fancied that he caught the sound of another door being slammed-to, and then he heard her heavy steps on the floor right over his head. He was more surprised and confounded than ever, and really began to feel that he was in a particularly painful position, one likely to lead to a disagreeable notoriety, if not to some darker termination. He would have jumped out of the window, and broken open the sashes,

but the height from the ground told him that such an attempt would be worse than useless, and would only seriously injure him.

In a fit of rage, having lost all command of his temper, and smarting under what he felt to be contumelious treatment, he went to the door of the saloon, and kicked at its yew panels with great force, and made as much noise as he could, in order to bring some domestic from the servants'-hall, as he pretended to himself, but perhaps he was chiefly urged on more by the desire of venting his temper in a fierce ebullition. This kicking, knocking, and beating of the door was renewed from time to time with great energy for half an hour, but not the least notice was taken of the noise that he was making. He even began to doubt whether he was heard. Again and again he knocked, and again and again he heard the echoes die away without obtaining for him the least attention. He walked up and down, chafing and fretting with indignation, for he did not as yet allow fear to obtain any entrance into his bosom. Sometimes he laughed with himself—or tried to do so—



at the nature of his position ; but when he recollected what he knew of Lady Rockforest from her own lips, and the wildly vindictive spirit that dwelt in her heart, and called to mind *also all the promises of secrecy that she had exacted from him* when she unburdened her mind to him, his countenance assumed a darker and sterner aspect. Then he thought also of his last visitor, and of the manner in which Mrs. Ullathorne had addressed him. He began to wish from his heart that he had never set foot in Catesby Court, or been admitted to a knowledge of its secrets.

“Who was this Ullathorne? Ha! could she be the person alluded to by Lady Rockforest as having aided her in—— No matter. Yes! It must be she! But no! They would have parted company long since. Yet Ullathorne certainly did seem to be conscious, as far as could be judged by her manner, of the nature of the revelations made by Lady Rockforest to Eustace Mildmaye. Her looks, her tone, her evil-seeming eyes, and the bad bold gaze graven on her countenance, all announced that Ullathorne was a person

very capable of figuring in the scenes described by Lady Rockforest." The more he thought upon the matter, the more convinced was Eustace Mildmaye that Ullathorne must be this person.

As that conclusion was gradually arrived at by his mind, his feelings became graver and graver. He felt that he was involved in a mesh of difficulties from which he knew not how to escape, unless he could persuade those who had been guilty of criminal conduct to undo, as far as lay in their power, the mischiefs which they had performed, and make even tardy reparation for the wrong. He had been the depository of secrets that troubled a guilty conscience, and at the time he had, perhaps, too hastily and solemnly pledged himself never to reveal what had been entrusted to him. He was not much of a casuist. He had no experience as a Protestant clergyman in auricular confession. Like many other Protestant clergymen, he felt uncertain as to the degree of secrecy which should be given to the revelations of a guilty conscience. Even if he had been told to divulge what he knew about Lady Rockforest and her life, he would

have scrupled to obey the orders of the Archbishop of Canterbury himself, after the solemn manner in which he had pledged himself not to tell what had been entrusted to him. Yet what else could he have done? Lady Rockforest was believed by herself to be at the very point of death. She was goaded by her conscience, and he really believed that at the time she had not one hour to live. He was taken quite un-awares, and had not foreseen any of the difficulties in which he might be involved; his sympathies had not unnaturally been engaged by the spectacle of the horrible mental suffering under which the conscience-stricken peeress writhed. In the hope of soothing her anguish, and bearing to her that message of peace which a Christian minister can give to the humiliated and sorrow-laden penitent who, "unfeignedly believing the Holy Gospel," will seek for mercy by those divinely appointed means through which mercy alone can be found, he had received the revelation made to him by the unhappy owner of the gloomy mansion in which he was detained.

While these and many similar reflec-

tions were passing through his mind, the time wore away, and the shades of evening fell around. He saw the dark broad lake become blacker, while the groves of pine gradually became enveloped in the shades of night. Nine o'clock had struck from the turret clock, and still not a sound of any one approaching came upon his listening ear. He looked out upon the scene before the house, and for the hundredth time the sight of solitude and of gloomy nature in her most funereal aspect met his eyes. Then he felt that strange, uneasy pressure which the sense of restriction imparts to the mind. Then he felt that gnawing pain which always falls upon a prisoner. Then he knew what the chained bird, longing for its airy liberty, feels as its wings droop by its side, its bright eyes grow dim, and its head begins to nod.

There were four windows in the saloon : three of them looked to the north, and one had an eastern aspect. This latter window completely commanded the great terrace, that, stretching for a considerable length, imparted something of lordly grandeur to the ornamental embellishments of the

demesne at Catesby Court. There was a wood behind this terrace, and some of the tall beeches in it were nearly bare from the roots up to within a few feet of their topmost boughs, but the stems of others were twisted by the ivy, and many also were covered by an undergrowth of some shrubs and many brambles.

While standing near the eastern window, Eustace Mildmaye's eyes rested on the wood behind the terrace. It now wanted not many minutes to ten o'clock, and the summer night was fallen, and there was that peculiar shadowy light which is so happily expressed by the Scotch "gloaming." There was no moon, and only a few stars twinkled in the sky. "Ha! what was that object in the grove behind the terrace?" His eyes had been resting on a spot where the undergrowth was very thick, and he thought that he had discovered a black figure walking through the trees. No! it was only his fancy; it must have been only his imagination confounding one of the tall branches of some dwarf beech with a man's figure. "Ha! there it is again. By Heaven, 'tis a man!" whispered Eustace to himself, excited by

the sight of a human being into an irreverence of expression contrary to his usual habit. That black figure could be no other than a man's form ! He could distinctly see its legs as it slowly walked ; the figure was tall and slender, and, as well as his intent gaze could catch its outlines, it seemed habited not in a cloak, but in a long frock-coat, that reached below the knees. There could be no mistake as to its having been a man's figure—no ! none whatever.

And now it was entirely gone. In vain did his straining eyeballs strive to see it again. So excited, so roused was Eustace by this glimpse of a human being after his durance of several hours under strange circumstances, that he felt his heart vehemently pulsate. Who could it have been ? What manner of man was that, rambling in that dusk wood at nightfall, and in that dreary and gloom-spreading demesne ? Was he in anywise connected with Catesby Court and its occupants ? Did he know anything of Lady Rockforest or her history ? Or was he in anywise connected with the woman Ullathorne ?

Such were the questions that floated

through his mind, while the thick shades of night enveloped that dread house, and gradually spread a deeper gloom. The senses of Eustace Mildmaye became sharper as he listened again and again, and from time to time cast a glance out of the windows. He had given up all hope of being able to attract attention, for he had from time to time battered at the closed yew door, and made as much disturbance as would have been heard in the most distant part of the mansion, supposing that persons had been willing to hear. As the night wore on, the echoes of the noise he made sounded with hollow reverberation along the great corridor on which the saloon opened, and fell with melancholy effect upon the ear. At last he gave up making any attempt to attract notice, and, exhausted with the irritation under which he had chafed for hours, and wearied also by the want of food, for he had not tasted any refreshment since breakfast, he flung himself upon one of the old sofas, and stretched out his tired limbs.

Eleven o'clock had struck long since, and the night was now in its deepest

shade. Far—very far away—he heard the distant bark of some dog, and he heard nought else but the sougling of the wind as it swept through the old woods around. All was still and almost sublimely solemn, and the pent-up curate felt his anger subsiding into something like a drowsy indifference. Again the clock struck, and its sound came with fullness upon the nervous prisoner; slowly every stroke of the midnight hour was tolled forth, and when twelve had struck its last, Eustace Mildmaye felt that time had passed with awful slowness from the hour when he had looked up at the sunny sky and watched the white fleecy clouds chasing each other across the azure vault. Want of food, weariness, and the nervous fretting of his mind were beginning to tell upon his physical system, and he became extremely disheartened and depressed. He had sometimes refreshed his mind and varied the monotony of his thoughts by turning his reflections upon her whom he loved, and indulging in thoughts upon Caroline Mildmaye. What would she think, and how would she feel, if she chanced to know in whose house he was at

that time, and how he had been treated by the extraordinary and daring persons who ruled in that abode ?

“ And why should Lady Rockforest be so extremely anxious about the idea of my marrying one of my Mildmaye cousins ? Strange, too, that she should have lighted upon the idea, though, perhaps, it may have been suggested by seeing us together in the hurst, when I addressed Caroline. Does she think that I would reveal aught to Caroline upon the subject ? Infatuated and terror-stricken woman ! Why, her senses must be gone altogether ! What possible reason could there be that I should reveal to the Mildmayes aught upon the subject ? ”

These were the thoughts that again had passed through his mind, while the second hour of the morning was passing. And now the clock had struck two, and a new day was entered upon, and the streaks of the dawn were beginning to faintly show themselves. “ They will leave me here all the night. Not until morning comes shall I be released, whatever be the end of this extraordinary adventure. I shall go to sleep ! ”

Before doing so the young clergyman knelt down by the sofa-side, and, with the calmness of a conscience at ease, humbly addressed his Creator in his usual evening prayers. The place in which he was, the circumstances of his position, the degree of responsibility he had contracted, perhaps, also, a creeping sense of grave personal danger to himself and others, imparted more than usual solemnity to the prayers of Eustace Mildmaye for protection and mercy from on high. His prayers concluded, assured that the stillness of the night would not be disturbed by any of the inmates of Catesby Court approaching him, he tried to compose himself to sleep, tired and wearied.

And now the chill morning dawned, and objects were more plainly visible in the grey light of the summer morn, which felt more than usually cold in that sunless abode, when just as he was dropping off to sleep, Eustace Mildmaye jumped from the sofa, as he heard a noise in a distant room. "Yes! it came this way." The folding-doors across the corridor were unlocked, and tramp, tramp, came a heavy step along the floor. How solemnly sounded the

echoes at that calm, still hour! Yes! the key was turned in the door of the saloon, and again Ullathorne stood before him.

He recollected that her countenance was sallow—its habitual complexion—but she was then ghastly pale, and her face was fearful to contemplate. She looked the very incarnation of wickedness, and there was something appallingly audacious and ferocious in her aspect that completely cowed Eustace Mildmaye; and the truth must be told, that his nerve had utterly given way (as perhaps had been contrived and calculated upon) under the pressure of want of food, worry of mind, and personal anxiety. Seen by day, or anywhere, the face of Ullathorne would give a person the impression that she was capable of committing dark deeds, and was probably conscious of some; and few would like to encounter the searching gaze of her large black eyes, with their malign expression. Seen then and there at Catesby Court, with her ghastly face, and scowling brow, and look of female villany stamped on her cruel and cunning-looking features, she would have been to many men a fearful object. The traces of recent anger were

on her face; she looked what she was, an execrable woman, whose criminal consciousness invested her with something of the terrible. She was still in the same dress, the same orange-satin gown, the same long gold earrings, and profuse display of finery upon her person. The largeness of her eyes, and the broad fulness of her bust, contrasted remarkably with the singular smallness of her head. There was as much of the material and the physical, and as little of the moral, in that woman's conformation as in any one that ever walked upon earth.

Eustace Mildmaye did not open his lips as she came into the room. Leaving the door open, she rather slowly advanced across the length of the saloon, towards the sofa where he had been lying. As he saw her approach him, with her grim, ghastly look, and eyes sparkling with a lurid glittering light, he felt as if a demon from hell had entered upon his presence, and his heart palpitated violently.

When she came near him, within two or three steps, she cried, with the air of authority as of one whose commands were not to be disobeyed, "Follow me up-stairs;

Lady Rockforest is very anxious to see you now."

Eustace Mildmaye, however, prepared to decline, and answered,

"I shall not go to Lady Rockforest, after the manner in which she has behaved to me in her own house. I content myself with saying that her conduct is the reverse of creditable, and I will not degrade myself by being the butt for her caprices."

As he said this the eyes of the woman Ullathorne became fiercer in their expression, and she scowled at him with satanic malignity.

"You will not degrade yourself by doing what is your duty, Parson Mildmaye! You decline to give your spiritual aid to a poor fellow worm—one of the lost sheep of Israel! Ha! ha! ha!" And she laughed with bitter irony. "Well, then, as you will not come to Lady Rockforest, I suppose that I must bring her to you, and here she shall come before five minutes elapse, unless you think better of your resolution, and agree to come quickly with me to her chamber up-stairs."

"I do not understand, nor will I endure the treatment to which I have been sub-

jected by Lady Rockforest. Let me out of this house at once."

"Ha! ha! ha! why what a comical character you are, Mr. Mildmaye. You shan't go out of this house until you have given us security that you will not divulge the secrets of Catesby Court. Lady Rockforest, by what she told you, is in your power; so too, perhaps, are others that you do not know of, and we must take care that you also shall be in the power of Lady Rockforest and her friends."

"This bullying will not answer——"

"Bullying! How dare you, sir, use such an expression? Why—go—do your worst. Announce to the public the manner in which a couple of lone women have kept a clergyman prisoner! Do! You had better tell how you were 'bullied,' and set the tongues of all the gossips, for thirty miles round, talking. What a credit it will be to the Church! If you do not at once come up to Lady Rockforest, as I said before, I'll bring her to you; for out of this house you shall not go until she has got some stronger pledge than you have given her."

The words of Ullathorne were menacing

enough, but the manner with which they were accompanied was infinitely more threatening. There was in her physical aspect and voice something that completely intimidated Eustace Mildmaye. Her threat of publicity and notoriety was one of the very best modes of making him obey her desires. He had a morbid dislike to gossiping; and the world's dread laugh at his being kept in durance would have been the very thing from which he would have soonest shrunk. Mrs. Ullathorne saw his wavering, and said, in a more quiet and less threatening tone, "Come, you shall not be long detained. After a few minutes you will be allowed to depart."


"And what does Lady Rockforest want me for?" said Eustace.

"She will tell you in her own room," said Ullathorne. "I can tell you that your cousins at Boxgrove are no favourites of Lady Rockforest. I hope that you will never be tempted to marry one of them, for it strikes myself, somehow or other, that no good can come of it to you."

In saying so much she fixed her dark and malignant eyes upon the curate. It

was a strange sight in that early hour, and in that lone house, to see the young clergyman, with his pensive, dejected face, on which ill-humour sat, in colloquy with such a figure as Ullathorne presented. The latter grew impatient, and in a peremptory manner again required the immediate attendance of the young clergyman, who, with sundry waverings and much hesitation, at last consented to accompany her up-stairs.


They left the saloon, and Eustace threw a glance at the great door opposite that he knew communicated with a staircase, but Ullathorne did not attempt to unlock it. She proceeded down the corridor to the great staircase in the middle of the house. The noise of their footfalls fell with a loud echo, and the sight of the cracked stucco, the tarnished ornaments, and the mouldering pictures on the walls, presented the details of a decaying edifice. The old stairs were curiously carved, and many quaint devices of antique decorations would at other times have arrested the notice of Eustace, but in the present state of his mind he had no thought for such things. They slowly ascended the stairs to the



third story of the house, and at either side of the corridor appeared the doors of several chambers.

When they reached so far, Eustace thought that he heard the noise of voices in angry expostulation, and the woman Ullathorne instantly stopped, and turned her ears as if in the act of listening. She made a gesture of impatience, and her countenance became black with sudden passion. With a powerful clutch she caught hold of one of Eustace's shoulders, and opening one of the chambers, suddenly pushed him into it, saying, "Wait there a while until I come to you again." She shut the door upon him, and half bewildered he heard her steps receding in the direction of the western side, where he had heard the noise as if of angry voices, and where the bedroom of Lady Rockforest lay. He looked around him, and saw that he was in a good-sized apartment, with what appeared to be a table and a chair at the further extremity, and there seemed to be no other furniture. There were blinds to the windows, which were drawn, and at that early hour there was not quite light enough to distinguish


objects clearly in such a room, especially to one who had come from a brighter light. After a little he could see better. He saw a small door in a corner near one of the windows, and he began to reflect whether it was a table or a press-bed was at the other end of the apartment. The form of this piece of furniture struck him. It was close to the wall, was entirely covered with a cloth, and was higher than tables usually are. There was something also standing on the table. What was it? It looked to be some ornament. No! it was not one. Could he believe his eyes? Did he see clearly? He advanced two or three steps nearer. He listened, but caught no sound of Ullathorne returning. Again he made another step or two, and now he saw clearer. This time there could be no mistake. He saw the object distinctly with his eyes. It was—yes! it *was* a crucifix. He saw glistening, in the form of a cross, a gilded effigy of our Saviour's figure, as it is commonly represented by artists. The cross stood nearly two feet in height. "And that must be an altar?" thought Eustace. "It looks very like one, at all events. The chair is a *prie-Dieu*,



and this must be a chapel." He recollected the dark figure that he had seen, or at least believed he had seen, flitting through the wood on the fall of the night, and he involuntarily associated that figure with the room in which he was placed, and with the crucifix. "Perhaps Lady Rockforest——" But his meditations were cut short by the coming steps of Ullathorne, who came to lead him, at that hour, under such extraordinary circumstances, to another and momentous interview with the unhappy woman, who awaited with conflicting feelings the presence of the clergyman whom she had that day treated with so much contumely.

CHAPTER IX.

THOUGH, as our readers have seen, the Mildmaye sisters had both spoken in very slighting terms of the Dryford balls, they were, in truth, very far from being contemptible réunions for the purposes of gaiety. There was an active Ladies' Committee, who were famous for skilful management, and for bringing together a crowd of agreeable persons, inviting to their houses for days before relatives of their own from distant parts of the country, thus setting an example of beating up for guests to crowd the ball-room with. There was a certain air of exclusiveness kept up about the balls, and a grand formality in debating about tickets, and the number of new persons to be allowed entrance, that greatly enhanced



the local importance of the Dryford balls. The effects upon trade and fashion of these assemblies for fifteen miles round was very considerable ; the account of them in the local journals was elaborate ; legions of gossips were set in talk for the week before and after ; the first-class gentry went for popularity, and to patronise ; and the secondary and more subordinate gentry went for the purpose of making high acquaintances. In short, the "Dryford Almack's" was a very capital specimen of the best description of an English provincial ball, such as it is seen in those localities where manufactures have not hatched a whole brood of upstart capitalists ; where territorial traditions and social landmarks are carefully preserved ; where thirty thousand pounds with a grandfather is thought as much of as three times that sum without family pretensions ; where old blood is somewhat too consequential, and new wealth is somewhat too much satirised, and perhaps envied, but where one best sees that intermingling of the old and new—that junction between the historical and the self-generated respectabilities of

society that constitutes the essential feature of our English life.

The rooms at the Falcon, the Royal Oak, and the Roebuck, at Dryford, were all crowded on the night of the ball. Those families who had far to travel, dressed at the hotels, or in private lodgings secured for them days before. Rattle, rattle, rattle came the carriages from all sides to the Assembly Rooms. A crowd of milliners' girls and shopkeepers were loitering about the door to catch a glimpse of the guests. The gallery of the ball-room was occupied by the band, and some three or four of the leading milliners, who looked furiously at each other as they found themselves, notwithstanding their special pretensions, all put on one level of a long stool without the ornament even of green baize, or the comfort of cushions to repose their dignities upon.

The earliest comers, as is usual on such occasions, were the persons who had the longest way to come. The first ten minutes of a public ball is about as bad as the proverbial half-hour before dinner. The violins screech most abominably,

the bassoon utters sounds ineffably ridiculous, and the clarionet seems as if mimicing grimalkin on a house-top. At the Dryford ball it was much the same way. The old Mrs. Nelthorpe, with her gawky nieces, paraded up and down the room for at least five minutes before any one else came in. Then came a lieutenant of marines from Woolwich, intending to affect the military exquisite, and fascinate some rustic maiden by his second-hand military small-talk. Then followed a dubious-looking young gentleman, with gloves twice too large for his hands, with well-made clothes worn with ill-grace—that was Mr. Thomas Saunders, a very worthy young person, but on that particular evening quite unhappy at his first intercourse with persons rather above him in station. Next came in, trooping one after another, a crowd of dowagers and daughters, and old squires looking sleepy already, and single young gentlemen full of foppery, smartness, and with vast pretensions of every kind. It was pleasant to see the greetings between parties who had not met for months.

Cousins, separated from each other by twenty miles, warmly shook hands; and visiting acquaintances, between whom bad roads and heavy affairs interposed obstacles to more intercourse, were so glad to see each other; and it was pleasing to hear the merry voices, and view the gleaming faces, and the cordial salutations. "Oh, I declare, there is uncle Charles and cousin Sally; and see, she has brought Mary with her: it is her first ball!" "I'm so glad that Robert is here; 'tis so long since I saw him." "Guess who's in the room? The Harrodale family; and they have all the Henleys with them." "Oh, let us come up to aunt Robinson." "Keep away from that frightful Lady Belcher, she'll bore you all the night." "Here are some of the —th."

And now the music played up, and the room looked bright with many colours; the pink and blue dresses contrasted prettily with the white robes. The turbans and feathers of the dowagers added their portion to the general effect, and the room being admirably lighted and well decorated, the scene was extremely brilliant, and very fascinating to those (of whom

there were many) who, not being regular hardened ball-goers, enjoyed the sight with the zest of novelty.

"They say Lady Ulverston is to be here to-night," said one Dryford exquisite to another, as they both leant against the wall, looking somewhat of the "gentish" description.

"Oh, absurd! Lady Ulverston at a Dryford ball! the thing is monstrous! I should not care to see her. I once saw her in London, getting into her carriage at the French plays. 'Pon my life, there's nothing remarkable about her. I'd sooner have a look at Lady Lucinda Vivian. Ah! that's a fine woman!" And the gentish couple twaddled in a corner for the night, and guessed at the names of the guests, mistaking ranks, and jumbling things together, like a young member of Parliament in his first month in the House; or a new whipper-in, confounding Jowler, who'll hunt only game, with Crawler, who worries sheep, giving the lash and name to the wrong object.

"Who are those lovely girls coming up the room, leaning on the old gentleman: see, yonder, in the pink and blue?" asked

Captain de Grey of the Guards, while he and four or five of his party stood near the fireplace and scrutinised the guests.

"Don't know," answered Cornet Woodbridge, "but, 'pon my life, they are a charming pair. Let us ask Sir Harry Bainbridge, he'll be sure to know."

Sir Harry was a noted fox-hunter and a sporting baronet, very popular in general society, and with an extensive acquaintance. He did not reside in Kent, but had some property there, and was intimate with several of the leading families. On being appealed to by Captain de Grey, Sir Harry exclaimed,

"Ah! I am not surprised at your admiring those girls. Those are the 'rival sisters.'"

"Oh! so those are the Mildmayes, of whom Major Beauclerc was raving the other day in town!"

"Yes," said Sir Harry, "those are the very girls about whom the major spoke so rapturously. The major will be here by-and-by, and I should not wonder if he paid them his devotions."

Sir Harry left the party and advanced to meet the Mildmayes, with whom he imme-

diately commenced a conversation, and solicited the hand of Caroline for a quadrille. Louisa paired off with Lord Latimer, who advanced to speak to the Mildmayes as soon as he saw them in the room.

Now the music commenced in earnest, and the stewards bustled about in all directions, and made themselves active in introducing parties to each other. The dowagers scanned the presentees to their young charges with shrewd and keen glances; some of the fair ones looked gloomily as they got bad partners, and others looked in the height of spirits. The master of the ceremonies walked about, looking as importantly as a chancellor of the exchequer in the act of announcing a new budget. The quadrilles were soon formed, every one began to be pleased; the room was closely filled, and the reign of joy commenced for the night.

When the second quadrille had ceased, and while the dancers were promenading the room, what a buzzing hum and clatter of many voices ran through the crowd! How bright and animated were all the faces, and how radiantly brilliant was the appearance of the whole assembly! Sud-

denly there was a thronging of persons to the door, and the cause of their doing so was regarded with curiosity by those in the further part of the room. The cause was soon explained, as the whisper ran rapidly round that Lady Ulverston was arriving. Soon she appeared at the door, leaning on the arm of a pallid young man—her nephew, Lord Beechcourt—an exquisite, and celebrity of fashionable circles. She was also accompanied by her nieces, the sisters of Lord Beechcourt, and by three of the sojourners at Longwoods, amongst whom was one on whom the eyes of both the Mildmaye girls rested longer than they did on the celebrated Lady Ulverston, whose appearance created what Sir Harry Bainbridge called “quite a royal sensation.”

Then Lady Ulverston advanced up the assembly-room, conversing with some of the lady-patronesses, who advanced to meet and receive her; for the fact of Lady Ulverston honouring the Dryford gaieties with her presence was a matter of great importance in their eyes. She sat down at the head of the room, and was well stared at. Soon another quadrille was formed,

and Harry Wilmot broke away from his party to speak to the Mildmayes, who were at the other side of the room, surrounded by a throng of friends. Both their faces became more animated as the graceful figure of Wilmot advanced towards them. In truth, the two sisters were very much pleased to meet again with one, of whom each had oftener thought in her private meditation than either of them would have cared to confess. "I wonder which of us will he ask first to dance?" thought each of them at once. "I am the eldest," said Cary to herself, "but perhaps he might take Louisa." "Perhaps he will ask me first," thought Louisa.

Wilmot was soon before them, looking very happy, and evidently rejoiced to meet with them again. He saluted them both with something more of cordiality than is usual in acquaintanceships of such short standing. He looked from one to the other eagerly enough, but something or other indefinable in his manner told that he preferred Cary most of the two. Both the sisters felt the fact. Cary felt it like a woman, and was much elated, though she concealed the feeling; Louisa

also felt it like a woman, and perhaps did not conceal the fact enough. Scarcely had Caroline accepted Wilmot's hand in the next quadrille, than Wilmot said,

"Excuse me for one moment; I will be with you in an instant." And he darted off in the direction of the spot where Lady Ulverston was seated, surrounded with a crowd of starers, eyeing her lace, her Parisian attire, and her magnificent diamonds. In a few instants Wilmot returned, and introduced Lord Beechcourt to Louisa, and soon they were *vis-à-vis* in the next quadrille.

As the dance again recommenced, Lady Ulverston rose from her seat, and looked at the dancers immediately near her. She scanned through her glass the partners with whom her nephew Lord Beechcourt and Harry Wilmot were dancing.

"Who can those girls be?" she said to herself; "there is something very striking and distinguished in their air and manner. What eyes Beechcourt's partner has! And what a figure, so light and sylph-like! Wilmot's partner is more beautiful, but she does not please me so much."

"You have seen the Miss Mildmayes

before, Lady Ulverston?" cried Mrs. Denham, of Denham Park.

"Ah! are those the Miss Mildmayes? I have heard a great deal of them." And the great lady of fashion scrutinised the sisters with increased attention. The Mildmayes could not help noticing that Lady Ulverston watched them rather closely, and they were not displeased at the circumstance. They had no *mauvaise honte*, and were perfectly conscious that they might sustain a comparison with most girls, though they had certain misgivings that their dresses might not be approved of by one who was a fastidious judge of everything relating to female ornament. Their partners made themselves particularly agreeable. Lord Beechcourt danced in a wonderful manner for a West-Indian exquisite. Pleased himself with the airy gracefulness and vivacious manner of Louisa Mildmaye, he pleased her in return by the quietly sarcastic tone of his remarks; while Cary felt that her partner Wilmot was in her eyes the most agreeable person she had ever met with.

The waltzing was commenced, and Lord

Beechcourt whirled his partner along the boards to rapid music; and in the same giddy round Wilmot soon followed with Caroline. Say which of the rival sisters was the more charming! Cary did not raise her eyes as she wheeled around, supported by her partner; her face, suffused with a slight flush, suggested the idea of delicious pleasure, of softness, and feminine gentleness; while in the large bright eyes of Louisa, and her keen vivacity of expression, there was more of vivid pleasure openly revealed. Cary danced with more quietness and less finish of style; while Louisa trod the boards with rare lightness, and the airy joyousness of an Ariel tripping over a bed of cowslips. Both were certainly very fascinating girls, and it was no wonder that so many eyes rested on them that night.

"Well, Beechcourt," whispered Lady Ulverston, "which of them is to be my niece?" And she laughed good-humouredly.

Her nephew laughed with not less good humour, and answered,

"You have asked me a puzzling ques-

tion. 'How happy could I be with either !' "

" They really merit their title—the 'Rival Sisters.' "


" Yes, as Sir Harry —— says, in his sporting way, it's quite a dead heat between them. Sometimes I vote for the blue, other times for the pink."

" I really must make acquaintance with these girls," said Lady Ulverston. "They'll cause a sensation in London if they are well brought out."

She then turned to Mrs. Denham, and expressed her wish to be acquainted with the Mildmayes. No sooner was that desire expressed, than Mrs. Denham, with radiant countenance and with immense importance, sailed off in the direction of the Mildmayes, who were seated for a minute to rest themselves. They both felt no small pleasure at Mrs. Denham's intelligence, and, taking her arm, started up with her to the top of the room. Lord Beechcourt and Harry Wilmot were both standing near during the ceremony of introduction. The Mildmaye girls had heard so much of the redoubtable leader of fashion, to whom they were then pre-

sented, that, as inexperienced girls, they might have been excused if they had felt a little anxious about pleasing her, and they were, in point of fact, surprised at Lady Ulverston's condescension. For one of the reigning rulers of fashion, they thought her affable, and more friendly in her manners than they could have expected; they made no allowance for the consummate mannerism of a great statesman's wife. Lady Ulverston now engaged them in conversation, and the hearts of the Mildmayes beat with increased pleasure, even to something like rapture, as they found themselves so much noticed by this great lady of fashion.

Poor, dear, sweet, lovely "rival sisters!" who could blame you for both feeling something like extreme female vanity, as in that scene of joy and delight you each found yourselves carried away by exultation? Your carriage to your old acquaintances about Dryford was on that night more elevated and frigid than it had ever been before. You were young, fascinating, and admired; you were neither stoics nor philosophers, neither were you mere



automatons with mechanical souls. You were women, young and lovely ones! Ah! Cary, knowing what bitter tears of anguish were ere long to roll from those lovely eyes, and trickle down those cheeks now flushed with pleasure, I cannot scold you for that toss of your head, as you tell Captain Dowling that you are engaged for the next dance, and "for the one after that, too." And you, piquant, coquettish Louisa! you, who have assumed such an air of greatness in austere receiving Lord Latimer's attentions! But no! thou pretty, wilful thing, I will not read a homily to you; too soon sorrow is to come upon you, and the world will wear another aspect from what it does to-night. Alas! you were soon to be rival sisters in misfortune, and had to experience vastly different sensations from those felt on that happy night when you shone the admiration of the throng. Enjoy the music and the bright colours, the happy faces, the looks of pleasure which greet you both on all sides! Revel on in your dreams as you see Lady Ulverston smiling upon you with good-will, while she praises you to the lady-magnates of your neigh-

bourhood. Ay! be glad, and glad again as you see your father's eyes kindling with pleasure, as he sees you courted, sought after, and admired. Revel on, sweet, charming, wilful things. I blame you not—I love you while I pity.

CHAPTER X.

ABOUT a fortnight after the Dryford ball, the morning sun was shining brightly over a beautiful scene in North Wales. Belvyddyr Hall was one of those magnificent seats which combine much comfort with splendour. The grandeur of the landscape in which it was situate imparted to the demesne itself a picturesque beauty that added double value to its park, its gardens, its avenues and forest glades, and to the noble mansion, which had for three generations been associated with as much hospitality as was to be found in the whole Principality. Of the transactions which took place in that picturesque scene we will have something to say, and we must pause to describe Belvyddyr itself.

Belvyddyr is a hill of considerable altitude, rising in a swelling and gradually rounded form from the sea-shore, spreading over a vast lawn of some four hundred acres to the south, sloping away from the Hall, which stands more than half-way up the height of Belvyddyr. The Hall itself is a very spacious building, occupying a considerable extent. The greater part of the long front is only two stories in height, but at each end there are large square turrets, which impart something of architectural effect to the building, though it is easy to perceive that the mass of the Hall having been repeatedly altered, it would have been no easy matter for either a Vitruvius or a Barry to have harmonised the widely-spread buildings into a perfectly artistic form. The Hall, however, is well calculated to give an idea of substantial magnificence. It looks nearly due south; and at the bottom of Belvyddyr the fretting waves of the Irish Sea break upon the rock-girt shore, and a magnificent ocean-view spreads far and wide before the delighted eye. For upwards of thirty miles the eye ranges along a glorious sea-coast scene, in which

the towering hills appear more grandly, from the fact of there being a level plain, or "Vale of Belvyddyr," running for nearly ten miles in length and three in breadth, from the base of the hill on which the Hall stands. Immediately behind the Hall is a deep and dark glen, and the scenery of Northern Wales shows around some of its happiest combinations to awaken the imagination. We will note only one more feature of the scene before us, namely, the vast extent of the conservatories, which adjoin the house, and are on a scale of somewhat disproportionate grandeur. For seventy years they have been one of the lions of that part of the country; but as our subject is not floricultural, we need only note their prominent dimensions.

In the eastern wing of that mansion there is a person to whom the reader must be introduced, somewhat at the expense of ceremony, but the matter cannot be helped. We must take the reader into a lady's bedchamber, and that lady the mistress of the princely residence of Belvyddyr Hall. It is just seven o'clock of the morning, and the sun is shining brightly into

the room. The chamber is unusually large for a bedroom, and it is furnished with gorgeous magnificence. The floor is curiously tessellated with fancy woods, the whole being waxed over, as in continental mansions. A vast cheval-glass, of unusually large dimensions, is placed sideways to a deep bay-window : there is apparently no dressing-closet attached to the chamber, though the eye catches an inner room opening from it. A large gilt rod runs across part of the ceiling, and a richly-figured curtain of light material hangs from it, screening off the toilet-table. The bed is vast, and as curiously carved as if it had been made out of the pulpits of half a dozen Belgian churches. Saints smile, devils grin, and cherubs look slyly from every corner and post of it. Chapels-of-ease have been reared at less cost than must have been spent on that pompous resting-place !

But who would look at the room, or its furniture, or the old Hall itself, once he had a glimpse of the occupant of that chamber ?

She is a lady of middle age, upon whose face time has leant with lenient hand.

What gravity of demeanour! what awe is in that countenance, as, with hands closed one against the other, she is making, before she leaves her couch, her earliest orisons! Her lips do not move, but the eyes are full of thought and aspiration. You see that she is in the act of prayer, and you can contemplate more easily those deep and darkly-beautiful eyes, that serene countenance, with an air of grave dignity; that fair skin, still blooming with a well-preserved complexion. She may be not far from fifty, but it is difficult to say how many years she carries.

In her figure, she is evidently on a far larger and wider scale than poets and artists would assign to the female form. Her form, indeed, is so massy as almost to disfigure her; but the majestic and dignified countenance, a certain grandeur of deportment and well-sustained dignity of carriage effectually shielded her form from suggesting either the ridiculous or disagreeable, in spite of the unwieldy size of her body.

Her face has relaxed from its abstracted air, and we see her usual bland and good-humoured countenance in its more ordi-



nary aspect, while drawing back a side curtain she pulls a bell near her bed. She has probably rung for her waiting-maid. What a lace cap is on her head! What enthusiasm would be raised amongst the Norman peasant-women at the sight of such a tower of starched grandeur! That lace cap deserves to have a history to itself, it is so tall and fantastically capricious in its profusion of ornament. There are persons who would think it a mortal sin to be caught wearing a nightcap of such extravagant value, yet the good lady is very quiet on the point, for while unbuttoning one of her wristbands, she tears her rich lace, and cries,


“I must write to Madame Marcel, to implore her, for the sake of old friendship, to choose me a dozen of lace dresses and caps of more value and beauty than these rags I have been wearing for the last two years. I really feel quite ashamed of being seen by my servants in such trumpery.” The amount the good lady (and she was good, generous, and noble in her acts and thoughts) spent on lace probably trebled that of any person, titled or untitled, in England. “But, dear me! how long

Dolly is this morning with my breakfast. To be sure, how hard it is to train servants." And again she pulled at the bell.

"Ah! here she comes. I hear her quick little foot. Come in, Dolly."

The bedroom door was then opened, and in walked Dolly Rees, a small, tidy little Welshwoman, with dark eyes, and a shrewd, intelligent face—sallow, and apparently not in the best health. She dropped a curtsy at the door, and looked as if she feared she was going to get a scolding.


"You are ten minutes behind time, Dolly," said Mrs. St. Pierre; "I do not like unpunctual habits. Lord Nelson, Dolly, was a wonderful hero, and he said he gained everything in life by being a quarter of an hour beforehand; and it will be recorded in history, Dolly, when on one occasion the Princess Victoria was five minutes late, her Royal Highness thought it due to herself to explain the reason why; and when Royalty can condescend to set an example of punctuality, I think that those of us in humbler positions may copy the Heir-Apparent in that, as in many other matters, with great advantage to



themselves. But I'm not angry with you, Dolly. Take care, girl; don't spill the tea on my counterpane."

Dolly Rees then, with nervous fidget, put before Mrs. St. Pierre a quaintly-shaped massive tray of solid silver, entirely without ornament, as plain in its pattern as a Quaker's teaboard. The teapot was as grimly plain in its design as the tray; there was no cream-ewer, but some-beet-root was the only addition Mrs. St. Pierre used. There was neither cake, nor sandwich, nor cutlet; in lieu thereof some thin slices of dry toast appeared in an old porcelain plate. The repast was certainly not of a very luxurious description, but yet Mrs. St. Pierre showed that, simple as it was, she would have it served only as she liked.

"The tea is again too weak. You must take it back, and desire Mrs. Hewison to send me some freshly-made tea, with two more spoonfuls of green in it than there are in this. The postboy from Llangaer ought to be here by this time, and you can administer this tea to him," said Mrs. St. Pierre, laughingly. "I desire to have nothing wasted in my household; and there is nothing, Dolly, that you, as a servant,



ought to pay more attention to than not wasting food of any kind, when there are so many poor humble creatures who would gladly have what servants often cast away. Now go : stay, I was near forgetting. How is your mother this morning ? Had she a better night ?”

“ If you please, ma’am, she is much better for the medicine that you gave her, and coughed much less last night.”

“ Ah, I am truly glad to hear it. It’s possible, if I’m in the village to-day, that I may give a look in on her. She is a very worthy woman, and I wish her well. Now go ; and let me have my tea as soon as possible, for I can’t get up till I have had some.”


Away tripped Dolly Rees with the rejected tea, and Mrs. St. Pierre calmly computed during her attendant’s absence all the things that she had to do that day. There was a large wine account to be looked into, where she strongly suspected that there was serious error. The expenses of the conservatory for the last three months had been more than they ought to have been, and she must invent some mode of working them at less cost. There was

a plan for the new school-house to be selected, which would take some time, as it was so difficult to make her dear Mr. St. Pierre decide upon any new plan; and she had a long letter to write to a great friend of hers, a newly chosen cabinet minister, whom she hoped to interest in her new mode of establishing schools in North Wales, and there were a multitude of letters, begging in charity to be considered; and—— But here's the tea, newly made, and Dolly Rees.

“Ah! this is something better. Yes, this is the way I like my tea. To be sure, it's very good for the people that the trade should be opened, but I don't get such tea now as I used twenty years ago: as in other things, we gain in quantity and lose in quality. But 'tis all right; the more comfort is spread amongst the people the better order there will be in the country. Has the postboy come, Dolly?”

“Please you, ma'am, I saw him cantering up the avenue just as I was leaving the housekeeper's room.”

“Bring me up the bag as usual.” And Dolly tripped off again, while Mrs. St. Pierre hastened to crunch a thin bit of



toast, and inhaled with considerable gusto the fragrance of the tea before her.

“ ’Tis very dangerous in a large country-house to give the opening of the postbag to any but highly responsible parties. As long as I remain at Belvyddyr I shall have no deputy in such an affair.” And she moralised on the importance of seeing that each person got his or her letters with perfect security; though the worthy lady forgot to notice that she herself took a truly feminine interest in regarding the superscriptions of many of the letters which passed under her hands.

Dolly soon re-appeared, with a large and handsome leathern case, of considerable dimensions, which she at first deposited on the floor, until she set a small table near the bed, to which she presently elevated the bag. Then Mrs. St. Pierre took a bunch of keys from behind her head, and singling out a curiously-shaped one, applied it to the large Bramah brass padlock of the bag. First came out a red morocco bag, in which all the letters addressed to her husband and herself were enclosed, and next were the letters to the various parties domiciled in the Hall.

“ Stay, I’ll sort my letters ; and let me see, here are one, two, three, four letters for dear Mr. Ross ; how fond his friends are of corresponding with him ! Take them at once to Mr. Ross’s sitting-room, Dolly, and leave them on his writing-table. The good gentleman is not up yet, I suppose. I’ll have the others sorted when you come back. What have we here : two letters from the War Office for Major Bromley ; and here are three, four, five, six letters for Sir Vaughan Gwynne. How soon an M.P.’s correspondence increases ! I’ll warrant, half of them are applications about places and demands for jobs. And here’s a letter to my housekeeper ; ah ! ’tis from her son ; West India post-mark. Here’s one for the coachman, and another for Mary Saunders, the new kitchen-maid : and here are two for Miss Bunbury ; they’re from some of her godly preachers, wanting to have a word put in for their promotion in ‘ this vale of tears,’ as she says. Well, I do not like her religion, she talks too much about it. However, she may be very sincere, for all that ; we must not judge harshly. And here’s one for Mr. Martin, and another for Mr. Harrison, and two for

the gardener (I hope they're about the tulip-roots); and here's one for Mr. Lockwood. And what a batch of them are down here! Let me count them all, and check the book." And she counted seven-and-thirty letters, and eleven newspapers, and marked the book, signing it, "Rachel St. Pierre," with a pencil left for the purpose by her attendant, who re-appeared to receive the other letters, which were to be taken to the library, thence for redistribution round the house.

"Dry this *North Wales Courier* for me, 'tis quite wet from the press; and now let me have the *Times* first. 'Tis really quite scandalous that we cannot have the *Times* here on the day of publication. This comes from the faulty state of our roads, and the churlishness of the Post-office in refusing to send a special post for our letters, because they say it is not called for by public interest. Well, the new Postmaster-General promised he'd spend a week here next autumn, after the recess, and every morning I'll, as Major Bromley says, 'give him a blowing up' about it. And now for the *Times*. Ah! they may abuse the *Times*, but 'tis the paper for me. It knows

everything about everything, and tells it all out in such famous style, and sticks to no party at all, for there's no party deserves sticking to. Yes, I enjoy my morning's read of the *Times*. A long debate again on the Irish question, and that I won't read; and leaders about the Polynesian Association, a fine humbug, I suppose, that the *Times* will turn inside out; and another giving it home to the Ministry: how it does rate them! 'Education of the Poor: Meeting at Willis's Rooms.' Yes, yes, this concerns me; ah, I shall have fine reading for this evening in the drawing-room. If they could only see the way in which my schools work, I'm sure that my plan would be generally adopted. I must write to Sir Robert, asking whether he would have time now to look at my system. He always answers my letters at length, no matter how busy he is, and now that there is a stir upon the subject, I think that the 'Llangaer Poor School,' with its double-check monitor system, and its juvenile 'Tutor Teaching Plan,' should be brought forward. Now, just let me look at Births, Marriages, and Deaths."

So this active-minded, benevolent, and

happy-souled lady glanced over the paper, previously to unlocking the morocco bag with the St. Pierre letters, which were always made up specially for herself at the next country post, a piece of official parade which this good lady dearly delighted in; for, with all her numerous virtues, she was vastly fond of worldly pomp. She soon dropped the paper from her hand, and made an eager exclamation as she read amongst the deaths,


“At his seat, Boxgrove, Kent, of apoplexy, on the 6th instant, George Mildmaye, Esquire, formerly M.P. for Mallington, and grandson of the late Sir Mark Mildmaye, Bart., deeply and universally regretted.”

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. ST. PIERRE seemed greatly shocked as she read the news of the death of one who was connected by kindred not only with her own family, but also with that of her husband. She was the more shocked from the fact that there had once been friendship of a close kind between the families, but for many years it had entirely ceased, and feelings of apathy, if not of aversion, had taken its place. The difference had resulted from money matters, upon which it may be necessary to say a few words of the St. Pierres.

John David St. Pierre, the husband of the lady to whom the reader has been introduced, was the great-grandson of Jacques St. Pierre, a Huguenot clergy-

man, who left France on the revocation of the Edict of Nantes. His descendants had engaged in commerce, and had founded a large banking-house, in which some junior members of Sir Mark Mildmaye's family had become partners, for the first of the St. Pierres, who had attained to great wealth, married a sister of old Sir Mark Mildmaye's. In the process of time the banking-house arrived to first-class importance, and the wealth of John David St. Pierre of Belvyddyr had considerably increased by the falling in of all the fortunes of his cousin, an East India merchant, and another younger brother, who had settled at St. Petersburg. For about seventy years the name of St. Pierre had been noted in the City, and the benevolent character of nearly all those who bore the name, as well as the political influence of the Right Honourable David St. Pierre, a prominent supporter of Mr. Pitt, had given the name of St. Pierre an honourable notoriety. The fortune of John David St. Pierre enabled him to keep up the hospitality of Belvyddyr Hall in a very splendid style. His health had suffered severely from paralysis, and he now lived entirely in Wales, having no



sons or kindred, and was little more than a confirmed invalid.

When George Mildmaye, the father of those sisters with whom the reader is already acquainted, had entered into City speculations, he crossed the path of the banking firm of St. Pierre, Mildmaye, and Co., in a manner that first provoked, and afterwards prolonged, enmity. Unfortunately, between Sir Oswald Mildmaye of Mildmaye's Court (the head of all the Mildmayes) and George Mildmaye of Boxgrove there had been political differences that aggravated the feud, and at last there was something like bitter animosity between all the parties. Mrs. St. Pierre alone had wished for a reconciliation, and had ventured her good offices on two separate occasions, but she was repulsed.

"How fearful it is to read of the death of a person between whom and ourselves there has been a want of the friendship that should subsist between relatives, and of that sympathy that should be cherished by Christians! It seems but a day since I was at George Mildmaye's wedding with Mary St. Pierre. That was a happy scene, and a sunshiny morning. I recol-

lect it as if 'twere but yesterday. And now——” Tears filled her eyes. She covered her face with her hands and sobbed. “Oh ! I could wish it had been otherwise. But my husband must not be told this bad news suddenly. In any case, I fear for its bad effect upon him ; it cannot but affect him very much. I must arrange that the news should be broken to him. If my husband were to read this in the paper for himself, I almost fear that it would excite him very much. But perhaps there may be some letter for us from Mild-maye Court, though I do not suppose any of them would write, as poor George was not a friend there.”

She at once unlocked the morocco bag, and guessing at the handwriting of the various letters addressed to herself and to her husband, threw most of them aside. A small note, with a deep mourning border, addressed,

“ MRS. ST. PIERRE,
Belvyddyr Hall,
Llangaer,
North Wales,”

attracted her notice ; and, opening it, she read :

“ ‘ DEAR MADAM—Compelled by a severe dispensation of Providence to intrude upon you, I could indeed wish that a less melancholy duty had devolved upon me, than the communication of the sudden decease of one who was nearly connected with you and Mr. St. Pierre. It is with great pain I have to inform you that George Mildmaye of Boxgrove is no more. He was stricken with apoplexy on Saturday last, while at dinner, and ceased to live in a few hours. I fear that his affairs were not recently as prosperous as could have been wished. His daughters are in acute suffering at the removal of one whom they loved and revered with the most affectionate regard. They have no other power to sustain them in their sorrow than that Heavenly Father, whose eye seeth in secret, and in His own good time will console and take pity on His creatures.

“ ‘ Believe me, dear Madam,

“ ‘ With sincere respect,

“ ‘ Truly yours,

“ ‘ EUSTACE MILDMA YE.’

“ ‘ There’s a nice letter for one cousin, and he a clergyman, to write to another

cousin, and she a Christian! 'Dear *Madam!*' He has madam'd me twice: he did not even put it 'Mrs. St. Pierre.' But I am in fault just as much as he is. If he had written, 'My dear Mrs. St. Pierre,' I might perhaps have bridled, ay, just as Caroline and Louisa Mildmaye did when I spoke to them, two years ago, at one of their Dry-ford public balls. Oh! these family fightings and chilling dissensions, what shocking things they are!"

She then pulled her bell rather violently, and soon three waiting-maids appeared in sight, armed with all sorts of toilet apparatus, and, after each dropping a curtsy at the door, the work of adornment soon commenced. For one who was a humanitarian, and an enthusiast in religious and educational matters, Mrs. St. Pierre certainly paid much attention to the garniture of her person and the magnificence of her array. She chose her dress every morning with a remarkable degree of deliberation, and calculated the effect of her elaborate costume, with almost as much care as if half a dozen plans for new school-houses were before her. While dressing, she kept up a running interrogatory of questions,

and her maids were catechised, criticised, and occasionally chided, while they assisted in arranging her vast body in garments of costly richness. "The lilac velvet for to-day," she cried, as half a dozen robes were offered for her acceptance. "Travers, take this key, and fetch from my closet in the corridor the white case in the corner." And when Travers returned, and the case was opened carefully, with what critical gravity did she not minutely scrutinise the head-dresses sent her from Paris! Soon, however, her toilet was completed, and it would be vain to deny, when her dress was finally arranged, that she looked a splendid specimen of matronly dignity and beauty.

Her maids were then dismissed, and she retired to her private sitting-room, communicating with her bedroom. She knelt down on a *prie-Dieu* for a few minutes, and again engaged in prayer, reading a chapter of the Bible. She then got up and looked out of the windows for a few moments. The prospect was a most noble one, but her countenance was more thoughtful than that of a person struck by the sublimity of the scene, which, in all its aspects, was too

familiar to her mind to cause much attention just then. She was thinking of the letter she had received, and the fact of allusion to the unprosperous state of her dead relative's affairs grated harshly upon her mind. Looking very grave, she went to a corner of the room, and applying a key, while at the same time she touched a spring, a door flew open in the wall, revealing a small closet, from which she drew a padlocked box, which she soon opened, and, taking up a clasped ledger, of no unwieldy size, she glanced over its leaves.

“Annual allowance from banking-house, 5000*l.* per annum. Rents of houses in London, 6400*l.* West India rentals, only 2800*l.*, on average of last five years. Interest on 150,000*l.* in Three-and-a-Half per Cent. Consols, 5250*l.* Income from Welsh Estate, 4800*l.* Total yearly income, 24,250*l.* Expenditure, last year, 15,370*l.* Yes, there is certainly an ample margin. Even though the West India estate should cease paying altogether, we can do right well without it. The money in the funds is perfectly secure, and the lawyers tell us that all responsibility in the banking-house is now at an end. Yes, we cannot be af-

fect, even if the agricultural interest were to go down. The world fancies us twice richer than we are, because they do not perceive we have not the same vents for ruinous extravagance as many of the families of the nobility. We have no children, and alas! that it should be so"—(and Mrs. St. Pierre's face fell while she recollected the fact of her not being a mother); "we have no electioneering expenses, no canvassing for popular support; we do not keep a pack of hounds, we are free from turf expenditure, and we have no prodigal young spendthrifts to cut holes in our purse. Hence we can keep up Belvyddyr in all its present style, and have a retinue of servants; and our hospitality here, though so much is talked about it, is far less expensive than if we lived regularly in London, from which my husband's health exempts him. Fifteen thousand a year makes a vast show when spent judiciously in a provincial mansion."

A shrewd and worldly-minded person, too, was Mrs. St. Pierre, notwithstanding her prayers and her sentimental humanitarianism. How sharply she scrutinised, for the third or fourth time, some of the

accounts in her ledger, which, however, she soon shut up, locked in its case, and re-enclosed in the concealed closet. The sitting-room was filled with engravings of all "the lions" of the day. Every portion of the walls was covered with portraits of statesmen, authors, and divines. Glancing round her room, she swept onwards, and walked out upon a long corridor, which reached a spacious lobby, from which descended a double marble staircase. At the head of this she paused for a moment, but then said, "I'll see Mr. St. Pierre presently, but first I must see whether the breakfast-room is all right." And she went down stairs, crossing a magnificently decorated hall, into a large room, surrounded with family portraits and some Dutch subjects, in which there stood a breakfast-table, laid for about a dozen persons.

"The marmalade again set out in blue dishes ! that is too bad." And she rang the bell testily. "Send the housekeeper here," said she to the servant who made his appearance. "Only three dishes of cold meat on the sideboard, and the sirloin of beef cut so very low: this is really preposterous. And the flowers are not set

upon the table. I see that my not breakfasting with my guests in the morning makes things sadly neglected." Then, when the housekeeper made her appearance, "Now go, and get the green shell-pattern plates for the marmalades, and order up some better joints from the larder." And then she proceeded to give a variety of minute directions, after which she took a walk through the suite of reception-rooms, to see whether the servants had done their duty in properly arranging them for the day, after which she proceeded to that portion of the great mansion in which were Mr. St. Pierre's apartments, for the purpose of telling him the news of Mr. George Mildmay's death.

But the shock which the good lady had received in reading of the news of the death of George Mildmay was not the only one she experienced on that day. On entering the breakfast-room in order to discharge the duties of hospitality, she was rather surprised to behold the looks of wonder, and even something like horror, in the faces of the guests. They were silent, also, when she made her sudden appearance.

"Dear Mrs. St. Pierre," said old Major

Bromley, holding the *Times* in his hand, which he had been reading aloud, "I am truly concerned——"

"Ah! poor George Mildmayer," began Mrs. St. Pierre, anticipating the ordinary language of condolence.

"It is really very horrible," said the Major.

"What wretches they must have been!" cried Miss Bunbury; "and those two sweet girls, my dear old schoolfellows, Caroline and Louisa Mildmayer, to have their mother's remains so outraged!"

"Their mother's remains? Good Heavens! what is it?" cried Mrs. St. Pierre, eagerly taking the paper, and reading the following short paragraph:

"**DRYFORD.**—Great sensation has been excited in this town by the discovery that the last resting-place of the Mildmayes of Boxgrove has been shockingly profaned. On opening the family vault to prepare for the interment of the late Mr. G. Mildmayer, it was found that the coffin of the deceased gentleman's wife, who died about fifteen years since, has been removed. Though large rewards have been offered, no trace or clue has yet been found of


what had become of her remains. It is conjectured by some that the coffin had been abstracted in the days when the resurrectionists were at work. Much sympathy is felt for the family under the painful circumstances. The late Mrs. Mildmaye was a member of the eminent family of St. Pierre.' "

And so overpowered was Mrs. St. Pierre by the perusal of the paragraph, that, turning away her head, and losing for the moment her self-possession, she retired hastily from the presence of her guests.

CHAPTER XII.

It was the very day fortnight after the Dryford ball, which has been described already. The evening sun was shining softly upon the quaint old structure of Boxgrove; the trees, the gardens, the place itself were all looking their best; but, ah! what a sad scene inside that mansion, where but a couple of weeks since there had been so much happiness and pleasure.

"Oh! Cary, Cary, do not weep so much. Do try and bear up. Recollect all we have to go through yet: but the worst will soon be over," sobbed Louisa Mildmaye to her wailing sister. They were sitting up-stairs in a bedroom, which commanded a full view of the bright and pleasant-looking grounds of Boxgrove. It



would be hard, indeed, to recognise in their ashy cheeks and sunken countenances the faces of the two charming girls whose appearance had so much pleased Lady Ulverston, and delighted so many of the company at the assembly of a few nights before. They were now about to bid farewell for ever to the spot where they had been born. On the next day a sheriff's sale was to take place in their much-loved home; their furniture and pictures to be held up to public competition, and their sad fall in the world to be the theme of a hundred tongues.

On the very day after the ball, an express early in that morning had summoned their father to town, from which he returned in three days, heart-broken and haggard: his affairs had been suddenly cast into a disastrous crisis by two failures of parties in whom he had placed the greatest confidence. While trying to eat his dinner at Boxgrove, he was smitten with apoplexy, and was a corpse in a few hours. Eustace Mildmaye happened by mere accident to have been at Boxgrove that day, and was of some small help in assuaging the first burst of the girls' sor-

row. He had gone to town after the funeral, and learned the state of their affairs. The "rival sisters," whose fortunes had so often been calculated upon, were reduced to their mother's portion of 5000*l.*, and even that was not upon the best security.

The stroke of misfortune at first completely overpowered them; but as they woke up to reality from the stupor of grief, their feelings of dismay became more acute and agonising. They were now to be schooled by adversity, and it must be confessed that their characters wanted a severe disciplining. Though naturally very well disposed, and even with many noble dispositions, their system of education had been far too intellectual, and not sufficiently religious. To cultivate their heads, and to leave nature to mould their hearts, had been too much the tendency of their father's system of training. They had been deprived of their mother at a critical period of life, and the governesses and school-mistresses to whom they had been consigned had chiefly attended to imparting to them those accomplishments which attract admiration. In short, they were by no means prepared for enduring with pa-

tience the afflictions that they had to undergo.

"Do, Cary, try and not give way so. Surely, dearest sister, I have as much to bear as you, and I feel it just as bitterly; but recollect, we must not appear abject and absolutely overwhelmed before the world."

"Oh! it is the thought of being pitied in our poverty, as well as the grief for our dear father, that perfectly crushes me. What shall become of us?" And a fresh flood of tears flowed from Caroline's eyes.

"Come, we'll talk to-night of what we shall do, but let us come away now."

"Ah, no, it is the last time that we ever shall be in Boxgrove. Let us wait till night has closed in. I cannot bear to part with it for ever while the sun is shining on it as now."

"Oh! 'tis better to come away now; the fly is at the door, and the sooner our bidding farewell to it is over, the better."

And poor Louisa, who had vainly attempted to play a stoical part, was soon dissolved in tears, and buried her face in her hands.

For the time was at hand when they

were to leave the house where they had lived in luxurious elegance, and dispensed under their father's presidency a liberal and dignified hospitality. "They were never again to spend another night at Boxgrove." They were now to fall down several degrees in the world, and experience the plain truth, that pretty faces, graceful manners, and brilliant minds, sink considerably in popular estimation when deprived of wealth and station. Their pride—and they had far more than enough of it—was to be sadly humbled. But at the moment of leaving Boxgrove it was not their feelings of pride which were so much roused, as the agony of affectionate leave-taking of that dear, charming spot, where they had played in infancy, and grown up in the joyous girlhood of life's early morn. They went out together from the Hall for one last round of the grounds in which they had enjoyed themselves so much. The sun was streaming his setting rays upon the western side of the old house, and the place never looked more beautifully. There were the two old chesnut trees, and the swing, in which when girls they had so often swung, and the square

fish-pond, with its swans. The rustic arbour, too, twined over with woodbine, in which they had read their favourite books on many a summer day, all met their eyes, and touched many a chord of memory. The formal old garden, too, was trodden by them for the last time. Alas! with what different steps from those of a few days previously did they now tread its alleys, and wind along its box edges. Every flower, every parterre, spoke to them of the past. There was agony in the retrospect! That they, the daughters of George Mildmays of Boxgrove, should now be driven in affliction from their home! That they, who had lived in such enjoyment of these rural scenes, should now be banished to humble lodgings, and compelled to face the world, was indeed a sore trial! It would have been one to any girls, but to the Mildmayes, with their sensitive feelings and impassioned natures, partaking (as we have intimated) of considerable vanity, the parting with Boxgrove was a torturing trial.

With many a sad tear, and with many a heaving sigh, they returned into the house, bidding farewell to the servants,

who were not to serve them more, and only remained in the place till the auction was over. The Mildmayes had declined the invitations that had been pressed upon them by some of the neighbouring gentry, particularly from Mrs. Denham, to stay for the present at their houses. Their grief revolted from strangers' sympathies, and their pride also (if the truth must be told) shrank from obligations. They had consulted with their nearest relative within their reach, Eustace Mildmaye, and he advised them, for the present, to occupy a small cottage near Dryford, about three miles from the town, and so secluded as to shelter them from publicity. Thither they repaired, and the comparison between the homeliness of their rented lodgings, their small bedrooms only like the closets of Boxgrove, the painted deal furniture, the worn carpets and faded hangings, was enough to strike any person, but upon the somewhat over-developed fancies of the Mildmaye girls the contrast struck with treble power.

There is a point in education beyond which it is injudicious to excite the imagination in young women. Men have the

realities of out-of-door existence, and the struggles of every-day life, to efface the morbid influences of softening accomplishments like music and painting. But women, from their sex, are excluded from that activity, and, when brought up in luxury, with all their wants anticipated, their sympathies quickened by all those graceful accomplishments which are esteemed as peculiarly feminine, it often happens that their natures become only too refined, and, consequently, utterly unsuited to the duties of life. A sentimental fastidiousness is thus often generated in female natures which disposes to unreasonable expectations, and tends to constant disappointment, while it enervates the character. It thus happens that men have too few, and women too many, accomplishments.

Both the girls felt terribly the wretched look of their place after Boxgrove, but they were called off for the present by their cousin Eustace coming in upon them. He found them in their little sitting-room, both in tears.

"I thought you had promised me," he said, "that you would exert yourselves to

overcome this idle grief. What good can it do you now, my dear cousins? The first burst of grief has been over, and it is really time that you should recollect the duties which religion inculcates. Have you no better hope than this perishing world? Have you no consolation to make you rejoice that your loved father is free from this world of care?"

"Oh! Eustace," sobbed out Cary, "it is only now that we are to be taught what the world is. Look at this cottage—such rooms, such furniture—the very idea of it makes me wretched."

"Heaven grant, my dear cousin, that you may never know worse. Oh! Caroline, I could wish that you had not said that, and that you would bow your head to Providence with more subdued resignation. I must use my clergyman's privilege, and speak to you gravely on this point." (And the young curate assumed a gravity of manner very impressive.) "Do not, I conjure you, tempt Providence to deal out more painful trials to you."

"What trials could be more painful?" cried Cary. "Our dear father snatched from us in an hour—our mother's remains

outraged—our prospects at an end—our fall to poverty—our unfriended lot.”

“Oh, do not exaggerate,” said Eustace, mildly. “You are not unfriended—you have many who care for you; and when this first rush of sorrow is over, I have hopes that you will be more of a Christian than you confess yourself to be. What man or woman, to whom the Gospel has been preached, shall have the blasphemy to call themselves unfriended, while there is the God and Father of the Redeemer to appeal to for help and mercy? ‘He that hath made the eye, shall not He see? and He that hath planted the ear, shall not He hear?’ I tell you both, my cousins, my loved and much-regarded kinswomen, that your conduct is most sinful. I am flesh myself, and can feel for human sorrow; but I see in my ministrations daily far sadder cases than yours. Come, then, let me see you more composed. And now, before I read a letter to you, I must ask you for a cup of tea, for I’m fagged after my day’s visiting.”

The distraction of Eustace’s visit, and even the petty bustle of preparing tea for him, was of some use at the time in dis-

tracting the minds of the two sisters from the homeliness of their new abode, and the words of their cousin had some little effect also in calling them to exertion. They were soon seated at the little table, set forth with a sorry equipage, and they could not well avoid making contrasts with their accustomed style of living.

The subject which, next to their dear father's death, then gave them most pain was, as might be conjectured, the insult offered to their mother's remains. Eustace had no new fact to communicate about it. The burial of Mrs. Mildmaye had been contemporaneous with the visits of resurrectionists to that part of the country, and the magistrates were of opinion that the coffin had been removed by them. Yet against that conclusion there was the fact that many other graves, in which, at the same period, bodies had been interred, were left untouched ; and it was also noted as most extraordinary that the coffin also should have been taken away, which was contrary to the usual course of the wretches engaged in such pursuits.

But to that consideration, it was observed that the coffin had been of unusual

magnificence, that its handles, mountings, and ornaments had been of rich manufacture, and that the spirit of theft had also animated the violators of Mrs. Mildmaye's earthly rest. The whole circumstance caused ardent discussion for several days; but although rewards were offered, and every exertion used, no knowledge could be further obtained.

The subject was a most harrowing one for the Mildmaye girls to think about, and it cost them many a bitter tear and not a few thoughts of horror. On that evening, after having told them that nothing further had been discovered, Eustace tried to change their thoughts.

"You told me," said he, "not to write at all to the Belvyddyr family, as you did not choose that any attempt at reconciliation should appear to come from your side. I shall not now say anything upon the propriety of that mode of proceeding. I felt, however, as I thought over the matter, that it would, under all the circumstances, be better that I should acquaint Mrs. St. Pierre with our calamity, and I did so, and I am now very glad that I ventured so far to transgress your wishes,

for I received by this afternoon's post, from her, this letter :

“ ‘DEAR MR. MILDMAVE,—Owing to circumstances that I need not dwell upon, the news contained in your letter gave me much pain. Alas! why it should be that estrangements should always be regretted when too late, and that our frail nature must require the grave to be opened before miserable resentments have an end! I may say that in my conduct to the deceased I was respectful, and that I always sincerely desired that I could have been permitted to have enjoyed an unreserved acquaintance with him, for I am sure that he had many virtues, and he possessed much talent. Mr. St. Pierre's spirits have become so depressed that I dreaded communicating to him the news of his relative's decease, for he is always shaken by the news of the departure for another life of those with whom he was well acquainted. . “ ‘You can easily imagine how horrified I was at reading the paragraphs in the papers about the Boxgrove family burying-place having been violated. I felt more deeply in the matter, as the late Mrs.

George Mildmays was a valued friend of mine, and some painful circumstances attendant on her death left a deep impression on my mind. For obvious reasons I forbore mentioning the matter to Mr. St. Pierre, but I shall be obliged if you can communicate to me any intelligence about the Miss Mildmayses. They must have a great deal now to grieve them in separation from their parent. But it is only for a time. This transitory scene fast fadeth away, and trials and adversities are required here below to induce us to recollect how perishing is this wretched world. These are considerations that you can urge with the power of a minister of God's Holy Word, and I may say from myself that, in my own griefs and disappointments, I have found that comfort can alone be had in reading and taking to heart the knowledge wise unto salvation which can be gained in consulting the Book of Life.

“I shall be glad to hear that the Miss Mildmayses have learned to bear their grievous loss with the resignation of true Christian hearts, and that they have received help from on High to aid them in

the dark hour of affliction. I desire that you will oblige me by presenting them my good wishes and sincere hopes for their happiness here and hereafter, and I am,

“ ‘My dear Mr. Mildmays,

“ ‘Very sincerely yours,

“ ‘MARY ST. PIERRE.

“ ‘P.S.—I may add, that I expect in about three months to be paying some visits in your shire, and it would afford me pleasure to express personally to the Miss Mildmayes my respect for them.’

“ ‘There is her letter,’ said Eustace, “ ‘and what do you think of it?’ ”

“ ‘Full of mere common-place, and the verbiage of letters of condolence,’ said Caroline. “ ‘I would have preferred that you had not written to her.’ ”

“ ‘And so should I, too,’ cried Louisa; “ ‘I think there is a great deal of mere cant in the letter. What made you write at all to her, when you knew that we were not on terms with her?’ ”

“ ‘That was the very reason I did write to her, my cousins,’ said Eustace, “ ‘because I felt that the heart is softened

in the hour of affliction, and that such another opportunity may not occur. I could wish that under present circumstances you had the friendship of Mrs. St. Pierre. She enjoys the reputation of being a most kind-hearted and benevolent person. It is true that there is some formality in her letter; how could it well be otherwise? But when I recollect the state of estrangement between our branches of the family, I can see symptoms of good-nature struggling to express itself, without breaking the formality of indifference which social etiquette prescribed her on the occasion."

The sisters, however, disliked (because they had been taught to do so) the writer of the letter, and they took a very different view of it from their cousin. He spoke in his usual mild tone, and urged his views gently and with quiet good sense, but rather ineffectually. Even the postscript of the letter made little impression on the Mildmayes, and they joined in requesting that their cousin would not again write to Belvyddyr without first telling them. His friendship, however, they never valued more than at that time. His presence was


no intrusion to them; their grief and thoughts they could lay before him as they pleased, without reserve, and insensibly, perhaps, to all the parties his society was becoming very dear to them. For when Caroline retired on that night to her small bed in her little chamber, her thoughts at going to rest were not entirely sad or bitter. She did not meditate altogether on the morrow's auction at Boxgrove. Along with many sorrowful considerations was mixed up the pleasurable one of sympathy in finding a thoroughly congenial friend. Her heart beat with the warmth of fervent friendship towards the young clergyman, and ere long it was to beat still more warmly with the passion of love for him. On the other hand, when Eustace walked home to his cottage that evening, after parting with his cousins, he was rather raised in spirits than otherwise. The calamity that had fallen on the Mildmayes he felt would have the advantage for him in placing his social position on an equality with that of her whom he had long secretly loved, and his imagination even drew a pretty picture of his bride smiling upon him before another twelvemonth had

passed. Her worldly misfortune would be the source of his worldly happiness, and what made her sorrowful rendered him joyful. For thus marvellously intertwined by the hand of Providence are the pains and pleasures of humanity. From the fall of one neighbour comes the rise of another, and he who scrutinises life and its dispensations will find that even in the dreariest afflictions there is a merciful intention. Well did Cowper sing of the Ruler of Heaven and Earth,

"Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE fall of the Boxgrove family gave abundance of food to the country gossips for three weeks, and the sisters were pitied through all the forms of the various sympathies of the genteel world of Dryford. It was felt by many that the sisters would smart and chafe under adversity more than most people, as they had more pride and vanity than many of their neighbours, though the world forgot to remember, or perhaps was not aware of the fact, that their pride had been stimulated, as we previously observed, by the very injudicious education that they had received. The two sisters writhed in private at the difference of tone towards them assumed by the shopkeepers of Dryford, and at the



sort of patronising pity with which they were addressed by the gentry with whom they had associated on terms of equality, if not of superiority, in some instances. Before the three months succeeding their father's death had passed, they looked forward with interest to the anticipated visit of their kinswoman, Mrs. St. Pierre. Already a brief experience of the hollowness of the world had taught them the value of powerful connexions in securing the respect of society at large. But Mrs. St. Pierre did not arrive in Kent; the health of her husband became seriously worse, and she remained in Wales. Their life was necessarily retired, from their circumstances, and the only person who was very intimate with them was their cousin Eustace, who repeatedly visited them, and was deeply in love with Caroline, though he did not declare his passion to her openly. In their intellectual accomplishments they found considerable resources, though neither their drawing nor reading could always divert them from gloomy thoughts.

There was nothing uncommon or particular in the incidents of their reserved and rather monotonous lives, with an ex-

ception that must be specially recorded, as afterwards one of them had good reason to recollect it.

On three or four different occasions the two Mildmayes, while in their rural walks, were much surprised by seeing a person, who was apparently a stranger to the village and its neighbourhood, stare at them with offensive curiosity and a lowering brow, and with something of insolence in the expression of his most sinister countenance. He was the same person, evidently, who had been observed by them, on their return to Boxgrove in their carriage, on the day when they first saw Henry Wilmot and their cousin Eustace together.

"That's a bad character, you may be sure," said Caroline, after being passed by him one afternoon.

"Yes!" said Louisa; "he looks as strangely fierce as if he were 'The Wandering Jew.' I wonder who can he be?"

And they made some inquiries, but nothing definite was learned by them.

Once when Eustace was questioned about him by Caroline, she really thought that there was something confused in the

way in which Eustace answered. It so chanced, also, that Eustace was with them on one day when 'The Wandering Jew' met them. On this occasion the stranger was accompanied by a disgowned clergyman of the name of Sawyer, a miserable reprobate; and when Louisa made some remarks about him, Eustace, in a particularly grave way, said :

"Louisa—I beg—excuse me—I entreat of you never to notice, or even to look at such persons. It is quite improper in ladies or women of character to do so."

And with this stern reproof to her spirit of curiosity the matter ended then. But on another day, when Caroline was walking with Eustace near a lonely common, the stranger suddenly came out of a copse, and stared fiercely, with scowling face, at Eustace. He was dressed in the garb, apparently, of a wood-ranger, and he was evidently no gentleman. After he passed on, Caroline turned to speak to her cousin, and was astonished to see him white as a ghost!

"I trust that you are not ill, Eustace?" she said, with anxiety.

"Oh! nothing; it was only a sudden

spasm. I am quite well now." But his lip trembled as he spoke.

She was greatly astonished. She was certain that his confusion had some connexion with the appearance of the stranger; but when about to express her feelings on the point, Eustace cut her short, and snappishly (unlike his usual manner) gave utterance to his detestation of being catechised about low characters, and there the matter ended for the time. Occasionally the stranger was thought of by the two girls, but he ceased to visit the neighbourhood, and all about him was forgotten, when the monotonous current of their lives was broken in upon by a new visitor to their humble abode.

On the day that Caroline was playing a new piece of music (for they had hired a piano), and while Louisa was amusing herself with sketches in crayons, they heard the sound of wheels, and saw a carriage outside their cottage. A footman soon made their door tremble beneath his thundering assault, and in a moment or two after the servant girl appeared with a card—"Mrs. St. Pierre." The Mildmayes were

unexpectedly surprised, and were rather discomposed by the sudden visit. They hesitated but for a moment, and in both their hearts there was a lingering wish to cry "Not at home," and fall back upon their poverty and pride; but more amiable and generous feelings prevailed with them, and they answered that they were "at home." The girls were very plainly dressed in half-mourning, but the excitement of being about to meet with a person towards whom they had occupied so peculiar a position, imparted a glow to their countenances that made them both look more attractive than usual. In a moment after in came, by herself, their cousin, Mrs. St. Pierre, dressed with gorgeous magnificence, slowly walking into their baby-house of a cottage with her customary stateliness. The Mildmayes curtsied when she entered. Their feelings of proud poverty still kept them back from advancing to meet her with extended hands, and their manner more resembled that of persons conferring than receiving a favour. Mrs. St. Pierre knew a good deal of human nature, and the absurd haughtiness of peo-

ple who have once been in high positions, and who frequently exaggerate their hauteur when they have sunk some grades in society. She was not discomfited by the proudly reserved carriage of the Mildmayes, but advanced to meet them with a friendly smile, and offering them her hand, said,

“I hope that you will not consider me an intruder on your privacy, but I could not pass through this country and not pay you my respects.”

“You do us much honour,” said Caroline.

“No honour in the case, I assure you,” said Mrs. St. Pierre. “There can be no honour in near relations visiting each other. I meant it only for something better, if you will take it as such—for friendship.”

She spoke with great sweetness of manner, with a courtesy that well became her ; and there was such a glance of affection in those fine eyes, that it would have been impossible to have resisted such good-will.

“We thank you much, Mrs. St. Pierre,” said Caroline. “We rarely see visitors.

Circumstances now oblige us to be somewhat reserved in our intercourse with the world."

"Alas! that it should be so. I can easily enter into your feelings, and I know what annoyances of various kinds you must be subjected to."

"Oh! we are not so badly off," exclaimed Louisa, with some gaiety of manner. "We can manage to keep off the blue-devils with the aid of music, drawing, and reading. Though we are very poor, we are not reduced to going out as governesses: our appetites are not very great, and we have not yet known, thank Heaven, what it is to be famished. I assure you, Mrs. St. Pierre, that we both make a very high-mettled pair of genteel paupers." This was said, in Louisa's lively way, with a good deal of humour.

Mrs. St. Pierre smiled, and said, "If adversity has fallen on you, it has done so with a light hand, and has taken away neither your hearts nor your spirits. It is not right that these forms and faces should be secluded from the world."

"Oh! you are flattering us, Mrs. St. Pierre," said Caroline.

"I am too friendly to play the part of a flatterer. I assure you that I have not come unasked into your house for the purpose of trifling with you. I come to you—will you allow me—as a friend."

"You are very welcome," said Caroline.

"Am I really so?" said Mrs. St. Pierre. And few could have resisted being carried away by her cordial manner, her hearty smile of benevolence, and her evident wish to please.

"You are, indeed," said Caroline again.

"Well, I am so glad of that," said Mrs. St. Pierre, "for I long to know you both, as kinswomen ought to know each other. Oh, my cousins! it would be one of the sweetest hours of my existence if I were to be able to call you my dearest friends. I long so to put an end to all that miserable, and wretched estrangement, which has existed between our families for so long a time. It was not of my doing, neither was it of yours—and who was to blame is not of the least consequence either to you or me. You are now fatherless and motherless.

Providence has called your parents to another scene, and the same Providence has withheld from me the happiness of having children of my own. It has made me prosperous, and surrounded me with wealth, and given me many advantages, which I should be glad to diffuse around me. I try to do as much good as I can to the neighbourhood of Belvyddyr, but I often long, when our house is full of guests, that I had near relatives domesticated near me, with whom to enjoy and share the pleasures of friendship. It is only now that I have been able, after my husband's illness, to come into your neighbourhood, and to meet with you. I come as a friend, to express my regret at our severance; and I so ardently long to put an end to it, I desire to have you in my house, and show you what I feel, if you would but permit me to do so."

"But how does Mr. St. Pierre feel towards us?" asked Louisa.

"My husband is an invalid, as you are aware; he feels strongly now on few subjects: his spirits are exhausted, but he is most anxious that we should all be hearty

friends again, and he has directed me to use every endeavour in my power to persuade you to come to Belvyddyr on a visit for a month. Oh! you would make me so happy if you came."

Mrs. St. Pierre spoke with evident sincerity, for in point of fact she was really fascinated with the grace, elegance, and beauty of her cousins; and having a great deal of the spirit of a patroness about her, she was most desirous to bring them out at Belvyddyr, and show off their beauty.

"Well," she continued, "I will not press you now for your decision as to coming to me, but at least you will dine with me at the *Falcon* to-day. I am by myself. I travel only with servants, and I shall send the carriage for you."

"It would be our duty to entertain you, Mrs. St. Pierre," said Caroline, "but——"

"Do not say a word upon the point: show me that you wish to be friends by kindly coming to me this day, and conferring on me a real obligation."

It was impossible to resist her. The manner was at once so winning and dignified, that it overcame the proud scruples of the Mildmayes, who accepted the invi-

tation. It was the first time that they had gone out to dine since the death of their father, and they felt old times come back upon them with touching effect as they stepped into Mrs. St. Pierre's carriage at dinner-time. It recalled to them the period when they were in all the luxury and pride of wealth; and the thought of their cousin's riches and affluence only made the contrast more painful. But such feelings vanished as Mrs. St. Pierre came forward to receive them, and kissed them both, pressing them gently to her bosom, while the tears stood in her eyes. How she conquered their pride and hauteur! How she wound herself around them by the magic influence of a real, kindly, and generous nature, allowed to enjoy the luxury of giving full play to its best impulses! It was a very happy meeting. The young curate was there with his cousins, and it did not require much pressing to obtain the girls' consent to the visit to Belvyddyr. It was arranged to take place in three weeks: the date was fixed, and all the arrangements consented to by the Mildmaye girls long before coffee was served to them on that evening.

CHAPTER XIV.

AFTER a long season of despondency and gloom, comparatively trivial changes of a pleasing kind rouse the spirits into unwonted excitement. The Mildmayes experienced this feeling to an unusual degree; for the fortnight before their departure on a month's visit to Belvyddyr, their faces were wreathed with smiles, and both seemed, as they were, vastly happier than they had been since the death of their father. Their cousin Eustace shared in their pleasure, and he was one of the very few persons who had been permitted to keep up an intimacy with the sisters since their reverses in life; for their pride recoiled from the commiserating sympathy

offered to them by the decorous politeness of the leading gentry of the neighbourhood.

When, after travelling through a romantic country, at the end of their journey from town, the servant, despatched from Belvyddyr for the purpose of accompanying them, pointed out to them the place where they were going to sojourn, the hearts of the two girls felt no small elation at the commanding grandeur of their relative's residence. They were always inclined to the love of splendour, and their taste for luxury had considerably sharpened the pangs of suffering that they had been obliged to endure from their sudden reduction to poverty; and it had been a sting to their father's mind, when it began to break under his misfortunes, that his beloved children were peculiarly calculated to smart under privation, though they might strive to hide their sufferings with Spartan fortitude. But now, while driving towards Belvyddyr, with the Welsh mountains towering over the road, and their peaks illumined by the evening sun, with the Vale of Llangaer before them, and Belvyddyr Hall rising at the distance of a

couple of miles from them, their spirits rose with exhilarating joy, and they felt that the world might smile on them again.

As the carriage rolled up the long and winding avenue to Belvyddyr, and the magnificent prospect of the sea burst on the gaze of the travellers, they forgot their fatigue in their admiration, and the sublimity of the scenery filled their minds for the time, to the oblivion of the family with whom they were going to sojourn. But soon they were at the Hall, when the mansion appeared to them far grander than they had anticipated, for they were not prepared to find that Belvyddyr was a much more sumptuous residence than they had been led to suppose. The long façade of the front of the mansion, with its lofty windows, and its highly ornamented porch for carriages, handsome though it was, did not entirely prepare the Mildmayes for the richness of decoration, and the grandeur of the large hall inside, to which they were ushered on their arrival amidst two rows of servants. They soon forgot, however, their surprise at finding Belvyddyr so much larger and grander than they had antici-

pated, as they saw the form of Mrs. St. Pierre advancing to greet them from an inner hall.

“ Ah, my charming girls, how rejoiced I am to meet you both! Welcome! thrice welcome to Belvyddyr!” And she kissed them affectionately. “ Now you must let me show you to your rooms; you will have three-quarters of an hour before dinner. We have not much company here to-day, but I expect to-morrow several friends— Sir Vaughan Gwynne, Judge Kirwan, Lord and Lady Penrose, and some more. Ho! Dolly, come here and wait on these ladies, and be sure to pay them every attention. Now let me first show you the way to your rooms. Let me be your cicerone through this rather complicated house.” So saying, she led them into another side-hall, up a large double staircase, across a square lobby, which seemed to have been wasteful and ridiculous excess on the part of the architect; from that on to a corridor, and off of that she opened a door, which led into a remarkably elegant sitting-room.

“ Here, in the ‘ green chamber,’ shall you both be lodged, dears, and I hope that you


will approve of your rooms." And she showed them, opening *en suite*, a bedroom at either side ready to receive them. "Now, Dolly Rees, one of my little Welsh girls, is to be your Abigail, and under your special command, and you will find her willing to help. I will drop in upon you again in half an hour, and take you both to Mr. St. Pierre, who anxiously awaits your arrival."

There was something too much of officious patronage, rather too much of condescension in the manner of Mrs. St. Pierre, but yet there was so much real kindness and good-will about her, that it was impossible even for the touchiness of the Mildmayes to take offence. They were not therefore offended, and they did not even permit their minds to dwell for an instant on the idea of being patronised. They accordingly set about unpacking their trunks with the help of Dolly Rees, and with cheerful hearts were soon ready to receive Mrs. St. Pierre, as she came to their sitting-room for the purpose of leading them to her husband to introduce them.

"Poor Mr. St. Pierre," she said, "is but poorly. He is a sad invalid, but you will find his mind perfectly clear and unclouded." She then took them along a vaulted corridor, which served to show the Mildmayes the vast extent of the house at Belvyddyr; and opening a door in one of the wings of the mansion, led them into an outer room, where she allowed them to wait for a few minutes, while she went into an inner chamber, to prepare her invalided husband for the sight of his long-estranged cousins.

They were received by Mr. St. Pierre with the greatest kindness, and with a courtly elegance of style that spoke of the manners of a past age. He took both their hands, and welcomed them to Belvyddyr, in a voice weak with ill-health, but sincere and kindly in its tones. He was a small man, half bent with paralysis, but there was *gentleman* stamped on the ruins of his once hardy and elastic frame.

"I sincerely hope," said he, "that you will make yourselves at home here, and enjoy yourselves. You say that you were never in Wales before, and there are many



sights about here to gratify the lovers of the romantic and the beautiful. Even at my time of life I enjoy the sight of fine scenery."

The first bell sounded for dinner, and Mrs. St. Pierre led them away to dress, and she afterwards descended with them to the drawing-room.

She entered the room proudly, with one of the Mildmayes on either arm. Then, indeed, may be said to commence their career in life, and possibly they would have been very nervous, if they had only known how close to the brink of adventures they were both at that moment. Standing near one of the fireplaces was a middle-aged-looking gentleman, dressed in the most elaborate style of fashion, with a striking countenance, a pair of large black eyes and vast eyebrows, and a few locks of raven hair disposed artistically over a forehead, which of course its possessor thought looked most imposing in its baldness. It was Lord Beauparc, whose bow was as well got up, as carefully measured, as his clothes, but less stiff. He was disturbed in the act of talking nonsense to two

rather nondescript-looking young ladies—the Miss Parkynses, the eldest of them with withered face and rather foxy hair, tall, thin, and thirty-three, with eyes like boiled gooseberries. Her sister was far more presentable—rather pretty, dark eyes, black hair, and face somewhat pleasing. They did not look to be what they were really at heart, as cunning a pair of schemers as ever wore petticoats, with a mixture of meanness and cleverness in their character. They received the Mildmays coldly enough, and with an awkwardness that the Mildmays thought proceeded from rusticity, but which really proceeded from suppressed ill-will, because the Parkynses saw at a glance, that, let them concoct what schemes they pleased to attract notice, that they would be completely lost in the eclipsing beauty and grace of the Mildmays. Instinctively the Parkynses declared war in their hearts against the Mildmays.

The door opened, and Mrs. St. Pierre, with some warmth of manner, introduced her newly-arrived guests to Mr. Baskervyll. He was a small man, somewhat re-

sembling a country clergyman in his general appearance and manner. His clothes were quite rusty enough for one who wished to pass "rich on forty pounds a year." The moment he heard their names he said,

"Ladies, I am very happy to make your acquaintance. I knew your respected father very well. I met him in the month of September, 1815, at Brussels, when I went over to see the field of Waterloo. Indeed, I remember perfectly the hour, time, and very spot when I met with your good father. It was at Du Barry's old bookshop in the Rue de la Montagne that I first met your father. He was almost as fond of books as I am myself; and I recollect that it was on a Saturday night that we met, and had some conversation together while turning over one of the best copies of Montfauçon I ever saw. I knew him afterwards in Parliament; and though we sat on opposite sides, we were very good friends. He was in favour of nothing old but books; and I was and am in favour of nothing new but bread and green peas. I recollect telling him so on an evening of

the month of March, 1817, when we divided on Tierney's motion, when there was a majority for Government. I know the very day that you were born, Miss Mildmaye, and, unlike ladies in general, you need not blush to hear it told. I am not going to give the date, but I recollect it perfectly, for on that very day your good father told it to me himself, in the library of the House of Commons ; and he told me in confidence that very evening that it was likely that he would get a baronetcy, if the Whigs came into power ; and a *shimful* thing it was that the Whigs did not give him one, but they always act *shimfully* to their old friends, unless they are of the cousinhood circle. I recollect once Mr. Canning quoting in my presence that passage in Addison's——"

But the name of Wilmot sounding in their ears, and the tones of a voice not unknown to them, recalled the attention of the Mildmayes. They were both very astonished to see sauntering into the room, with all the familiar ease of an intimate guest, that Mr. Wilmot with whom they had made a slight acquaintance before their

father's death. Their feelings were those of surprise, pain, and pleasure, as they thought of the strangeness of meeting him again so unexpectedly, and of the circumstances under which their previous acquaintance had been interrupted. Wilmot appeared very glad to see them, and frankly expressed his pleasure at seeing them again. When the Miss Parkynses heard the words "met before" pass between them, they looked at each other with an air of intelligence, as if they suspected that there had been a previous flirtation on the part of the Mildmayes. Doctor Fryers, the head of a great boarding-school, patronised by the St. Pierre family for two generations, then came in, with as much pomposity and sternness of air as if he were going to dose the company with birch and Greek particles; the rector of the parish followed, as did also a local physician; and a civil engineer, with particularly *uncivil* manners, then staying in the neighbourhood and employed on Government works, completed the party.


Never had the Mildmaye girls looked lovelier or more engaging than on that

day, and Mrs. St. Pierre, as she sat at the head of the table, was proud of her relatives, and regarded them with feelings of exultant complacency. Wilmot's eyes often turned towards them, and the fact was noted by the Miss Parkynses, who alone of the company seemed not pleased with the brilliant addition to the guests at Belvyddyr. The Mildmayes themselves were in great spirits, and enjoyed themselves very much, as they found themselves again in a circle of society in which they were well qualified to shine by their union of grace and beauty. Caroline was pleased with the talk of Lord Beauparc. He spoke of pictures, books, and scenery with the gusto of an enthusiastic amateur, and talked familiarly of the best circles of London life in a way calculated to attract a novice. Whether subsequent acquaintance on her part sustained the imposing first impressions of Lord Beauparc, we shall see further on.

But Louisa had got a beau that she knew not what to make of. Mr. Baskervyll spoke of himself as a bachelor, and talked incidentally of his deer-park, his

mountain castle in Scotland, and his seat in Yorkshire, and his packs of hounds. The evident respect which Mrs. St. Pierre showed for him, and the degree of attention paid to him by the company, convinced Louisa's natural quickness of perception that Mr. Baskervyll must be a person of considerable importance. But he talked so rapidly and inarticulately, he so spluttered forth his words, and used such a prodigality of quotations from various tongues, ancient and modern, while at the same time he mispronounced several English words, that she could not divine what manner of man he was.

"My dear," said Mrs. St. Pierre after dinner to Louisa, "I only wish from my heart that you were Mrs. Baskervyll. He lives generally at Baskervyll Park, in Yorkshire, where he has a most magnificent library—one of the lions of the neighbourhood. He is immensely rich, and though he keeps up a certain state and style, he lives himself in a small study, except when he is roaming through his library. He is one of the most learned men of the age. Such knowledge! such



languages! and such dates! In short, he's a prodigy of knowledge; and how he acquired it all, and how he remembers it, I cannot say. I can tell you, my dear, that many a young lady has her cap set at him; and as he's perfectly harmless, has no vice, beyond that of occasionally boring one with a little too much of Spanish, German, and Greek, he'll be a capital catch for the girl who's to be installed at Baskervyll Park."

From Mr. Baskervyll the conversation glanced off to Henry Wilmot.

"I thought," said Louisa, with some degree of curiosity, "that Mr. Wilmot was intended for public life, and that he was to be a diplomatist."

"Ah! poor Wilmot is not rich enough for that. Public life in this enormously rich country is a most aristocratic privilege: it demands a vast outlay of money: Wilmot has been glad enough to accept a few hundreds a year as an Assistant Poor-Law Commissioner, in preference to dragging on a perfectly subaltern existence on miserable pay in the — Office. He might have continued a clerk there, and

perhaps in the long run might have managed to rise from it; but Wilmot has a mother, to whom he has acted like a most generous son, and he gives her a large part of his present salary. I have seen the tears in her eyes as she spoke of him."

"But he may yet get on higher?" said Louisa, inquiringly.

"Ah! I am afraid not. Only for the generous way Sir Vaughan Gwynne exerted himself in his favour, Wilmot would not have got even his present post. It was I who introduced him to Sir Vaughan Gwynne, and continued to interest Sir Vaughan for him. Sir Vaughan's father and old Jack Wilmot the wit were old friends, and Sir Vaughan acted a most kind part in the whole transaction."

This account about Wilmot greatly interested Louisa Mildmaye, and when he came into the drawing-room to coffee, she looked at him with much interest. He slid over and contrived to sit down near her sister Caroline, and by the smiling face of Caroline it was evident that Wilmot's conversation was peculiarly engag-

ing and agreeable. Louisa was less fortunate, for no sooner did Mr. Baskervyll enter the drawing-room than he proceeded to renew his dinner-table acquaintance with her, and poor Louisa's ears were stunned, and her brain almost addled by a torrent of quotations and anecdotes, delivered with the greatest vehemence; Mr. Baskervyll evidently believing that the more he resembled a talking lexicon, the more perfectly fascinating was he to his half-bewildered and somewhat drowsy listener.

CHAPTER XV.

THE pleasure expressed by Mr. and Mrs. St. Pierre in having the Mildmayes sojourning under their roof was shared in by nearly all their guests. The "rival sisters" had excited universal admiration in the Belvyddyr circle, always excepting the Miss Parkynses, who found Caroline's face too inanimate, and Louisa's nose too short, and her mouth too long, and who took constant care to remind everybody of the downfall that the two sisters had undergone. Lord Beauparc was an old dandy, and almost a morbidly fastidious *connoisseur*. He admired their beauty as being fresh, and somewhat out of the common style. He could have wished that they

appeared to be more duly impressed with his own importance. But the Mildmayes had seen at a slight acquaintance that Lord Beauparc was only a pretender to fashion. He was a mere pauper lord, with an estate of a couple of thousand a year, and a pension of twelve hundred a year. His peerage was one of the *noblesse de robe*, his father having been a law-lord, sent up into the Peers in order to get rid of Chancery arrears. Mr. Baskervyll, however, was very hearty in his admiration for the two sisters, whose attainments and talents obtained his respect. Louisa proved a better listener than could have been anticipated. She heard him patiently vociferate all his quotations; and while he thought that she was attending to his eruption of learning, Louisa Mildmaye was sily studying his display of character.

As for the Mildmayes themselves, they were charmed with the life at Belvyddyr. A constant succession of guests and visitors poured into it almost daily, and they saw a greater number of new faces, and were introduced to a greater number of

new acquaintances than in all their previous life. The novelty of the whole scene had great charms for them, and their seclusion in the cottage near Dryford contrasted as strongly with the gaiety and dazzling variety of their round of pleasure at Belvyddyr, as life in a wigwam in the backwoods of America with a sojourn in a palace of Aladdin. They enjoyed the scene of life presented to them, and every shade of depression vanished from their brows, while they appeared at once radiant with joy and high hopes.

Yes! They were then, after a long obscurity under the cloud of adversity, basking in Fortune's sunshine; but who that looked on those fair girls could ever have guessed that it was doomed for them to pass under many a shade, and thoroughly realise to their minds the vicissitudes of the drama of life! But so it was, and we will not anticipate their story.

The Mildmaye girls had often heard the name of Sir Vaughan Gwynne mentioned, and from the way in which he had been spoken of, they felt some curiosity to see him. They heard his talents and accom-

plishments praised, and the respect which Mrs. St. Pierre professed for him, and which, it was very evident, she sincerely felt, disposed the Mildmayes to think very favourably of him. Nor did it diminish their prejudice in his favour to hear Mr. Wilmot sounding his praises emphatically, and dwelling with unction on the many fine qualities that he possessed; and we may add, that it did not detract from their desire to see him that Mr. Baskervyll shook his head a little at Sir Vaughan, and doubted whether he was a profound classical scholar.

“Sir Vaughan,” said Wilmot, “has attended more to the thoughts and sentiments of the classical writers than to their words. He knows their beauties of composition, as a gentleman and accomplished man of the world should, and not as a mere gerund-grinding schoolmaster. He knows them as a Chesterfield or a Chatham would care to know them, and not as a Dryasdust or a Dibdin.”

Knowing that Wilmot was under obligation to Sir Vaughan Gwynne, his defence of him, though savouring of asperity to-

wards Mr. Baskervyll, was readily accepted by the Mildmayes, who smiled as they observed a peevish expression creep over the countenance of Mr. Baskervyll. The conversation was at the breakfast-table, where only a few of the guests were assembled, for the only irregular thing in the Belvyddyr establishment was the hours at which the guests breakfasted. Mrs. St. Pierre was present, and turning to a Miss Tufton, said to that young lady, who was seated near her,

“Sir Vaughan Gwynne is not likely to be in the country for some days, and there will be an excellent opportunity of seeing his place without the formality of a reception. I think that I will drive over there to-morrow, and have an *al fresco* party in the glen, and you and the Miss Mildmayes can see his pictures: they are worth looking at; and even if you do not admire the landscapes that he has painted himself, you must surely admire that which opens to the view from Llangaer.”

“Oh, it will be quite delightful to have a drive to Llangaer,” cried Miss Tufton; “the scenery, the views, the glen, the

waterfall are so charming. Lord Beauparc, don't you admire Llangaer very much?"

"Why—*aw*—yes! that is to say—*aw*—Nature has done a good deal for it, but a skilful landscape-gardener could greatly improve it. The glens, though wild and precipitous, are not large enough for perfect beauty; they suggest rather than realise the grand, and awaken expectations of the sublime, which a closer inspection dissipates. The lawn is decidedly the best thing—*aw*—decidedly the best feature—*aw*—at Llangaer. I admire particularly its breadth of effect, and its shelving off so gradually as to allow a carriage to roll down the avenue with rapidity, and yet present the height requisite to give elevation to the scene. The timber is bad—mere brushwood—and very injudiciously disposed. It is easy for sciolists to disparage Repton and Uvedale Price, but—*aw*—a little attention to their works would—*aw*—have enabled Sir Vaughan to give more harmonious effect, and a greater variety of points to his improvements. The castle is but a pepper-box on a rock. I am surprised that a man of his talent

could be guilty of producing such a lath-and-plaster piece of imposture——”

“It was his mother’s doing,” interrupted Mr. Wilmot, “and he ought not to be held responsible for his mother’s peccadilloes in stone and mortar.”

“And a very ponderous peccadillo she committed at Llangaer,” continued the noble landscape-gardener, warming with his subject, for it was the one topic which he knew best; “but if I were Sir Vaughan, I would at once send for Barry, and desire him to decastellate the concern. By the soul of Sir John Vanbrugh—always supposing that poor Van had one—*aw*—Sir Vaughan’s castle looks like a mongrel mixture of a mountain battery and a Manchester calico factory. Haw!—haw!—haw!”

Wilmot evidently did not like to hear Sir Vaughan’s place so severely disparaged, and he was going to undertake its defence, but Mr. St. Pierre cut the conversation short, and said,

“Well, we will leave it to the Miss Mildmayes and Miss Tufton to decide whether the castle of Llangaer is such an

atrocities as Lord Beauparc describes it to be. It is fortunate for the fair fame of Llangaer Castle that the umpires of tomorrow have not seen the charming glades and beautiful lakes of Parknagar, Lord Beauparc. If they had, I fear they would decide the point with you."

The prospect of an *al fresco* party at Llangaer caused much pleasure amongst the guests at Belvyddyr, and they talked a great deal of it during the day. Sir Vaughan Gwynne and his ancestors were most minutely dissected, and the curiosity of the Mildmayes to see him was very great. If they could have foreseen events, they could scarcely have been less desirous to behold the person who was in a considerable degree mixed up with their personal history in after-days.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALL the parties retired early to rest that evening, in order to be prepared for an early breakfast and a drive of fifteen miles to Llangaer. The weather was very beautiful, and highly favourable to a country excursion. It so chanced that Caroline Mildmaye woke early in the morning, very contrary to her habit, for Mrs. St. Pierre had often silyly commented on the Mildmaye girls being rather late in the morning. But not long after four o'clock struck, Caroline was wide awake and busy in reflection. If with the privileges, reader, of Asmodeus you could have looked through the white curtains of her couch, you would have seen that Caroline was musing very

gravely. Exercising that privilege, we will translate into language the thoughts that were chasing each other through her mind.

"We are almost quite at home in this place, and it is evident that Louisa and myself are treated as great favourites by Mrs. St. Pierre. But how long is it all to last? This delightful summer visit will vanish like the flowers of the season, and we must again retire to our cottage near Dryford, and vegetate in obscurity. Well, they may talk as they please, but 'the world' is a very delightful thing, if one has only fortune enough to enjoy it. What a life of mere seclusion Louisa and I have led since my dear father's death! It has been a long trance rather than life, and how very unlike these delicious weeks that we have been spending in this beautiful place! Oh, what a delightful thing it must be to be mistress of such an establishment as Mrs. St. Pierre is at the head of: it is like being a petty queen. Shouldn't I like it! If Louisa and I were at the head of such a house as this, shouldn't we make the world know the fact! And yet, perhaps, after a time we would sigh for quiet. After all,

we had some happy hours in the cottage at Dryford. Eustace's conversation was very charming, and I have seen nobody here but Mr. Wilmot to compare with him—— I like Mr. Wilmot very much. He is, certainly, one of the nicest-looking persons I ever saw. There is something about him that is peculiarly interesting, whether it be the sweetness of his smile, or the grace of his manner, or the elegance of his figure. What a pity that he has not got a fortune! With so much grace and winning appearance, to be only a Poor-Law Commissioner! Which is, he or Eustace, the nicest? Eustace is handsomer and softer, but the other has so much the air of a graceful man of the world: the point could be argued either way. I think that Louisa admires Mr. Wilmot very much. I suspect that she likes him more than I do. By the way, how very fortunate it was that I did not read to Louisa the enclosed slip in Eustace's agreeable letter of yesterday. I must read that wonderful passage again."

As if by impulse, Caroline got out of bed and, walking across her bedroom, unlocked a small bureau, in the corner of

which was lying the letter which, as the reader already knows, had arrived at Belvyddyr the day before. Grasping the letter, Caroline took it back to bed with her, and, pulling back her curtain, read it slowly over.

There was a slip of paper enclosed by Eustace, and while Caroline read it, her face became more thoughtful and grave :

“On yesterday I was walking over the hurst, and came to the spot where, three months ago, I had the pleasure of holding such a deeply interesting conversation with you. How often have I recalled that evening ! How often have I meditated on your words—not to speak to you in such strains as I dared then to address to you, until another twelvemonth should have passed away. Ah ! Caroline, even now I fear that my fate may be decided while you are sojourning at Belvyddyr. But I forbear to say more. God grant that you may be always happy, and not in the anxious mood of mind that is my lot.”

“I am so glad,” thought Caroline, “that Louisa did not see that scrap ; I was so near giving her the whole letter to read.

I would not wish that dearest Louisa, much as I love her, should know that Eustace had ever addressed me as a lover. How much she admires him herself! I almost think that if he had addressed himself to her instead of to me, that his suit would have been immediately accepted. And yet I think that I can judge, by her manner, that she admires Mr. Wilmot very much. Will either of us ever be Mrs. Wilmot? Or what will be our fate? We are young, orphans, and poor. We are above our fortunes in taste and disposition, and I hope in spirit: are we to fade away into genteel and withered maidenhood, with nobody to make love to us, and paying our tender attentions to a poodle dog, a couple of canary-birds, and a tortoiseshell cat? Ugh! what an end for poor Louisa and Caroline to come to! Better, almost, to go out for governesses and see life, than to be gradually extinguished by inches, as the old maids of some secluded village. By this day twelvemonth we shall know a good deal."


Early as was the hour, Caroline got up and threw on her dressing gown and slip-

pers. She could not sleep any more. Her mind had become active, while pondering over the chances of herself and her sister, and while perusing the letter of one by whom she well knew that she was beloved. Opening her bedroom in a half careless, half meditative mood of mind, she walked out softly into the sitting-room which intervened between the chambers in which she and Louisa slept. She walked up to the window, and drew aside the blind. What a prospect burst upon her view! The sun was just risen over the Llangaer mountains, and the arch of heaven was silvered over with radiant brightness. The mountains raised their huge blue forms against the sky, and the shadows of the tall trees fell aslant across the green sward, upon which still reposed the deer: it was a very beautiful and soul-awakening sight. Its calmness and sublimity aroused the emotions of Caroline, who had a strongly poetical feeling for all beauty, and whose highly cultivated intellect and imaginative mind associated a spiritual sense with the grand scenery of Nature. The serenity and splendour of the early sunrise was con-

trasted in her mind with the stormy and troubled changes of life.

“Fair as is this lovely morn, perhaps ere evening has arrived the sky may be overcast, and yonder mountain-peaks be obscured by the mists before a coming storm. Thus bright and beautiful has been the early portion of life enjoyed by Louisa and myself; yet long before our youth has passed, we have been made to partake of clouds and darkness. And what fate is reserved for us both? Of that we are as unconscious as Louisa is this moment of what topics are passing through my mind.”

Retiring from the window, she gently approached the door that opened from their common sitting-room into Louisa's apartment. She noiselessly opened the door, and crept softly into her sister's chamber. The curtain was drawn back from the bed, and Louisa's face was turned towards the light, her head lying in a very uneasy posture off the pillow. Caroline mechanically sat down, and quietly gazed upon her sister's countenance. They both loved each other very much, and it was with



fondness that Caroline, in a musing mood, sat contemplating her sister's beauty. "What a forehead she has!" thought Caroline; "'tis carved as if a sculptor had chiselled it; and how expressive it is, even without the radiance of her large eyes! But what ails her? She sleeps uneasily, and her chest begins to heave: she must have some painful dream." Soon Louisa gave a sort of feeble cry, or moan, as if she had a nightmare, and Caroline hastened to awake her.

"Dear girl, what ails you?"

"Oh! oh!" cried Louisa, awaking; "thank God, 'tis but a dream. Oh, I was so frightened. I thought that I saw cousin Eustace."

"Cousin Eustace!" cried Caroline with some astonishment, recollecting that she actually held in her hand the letter from him, which she had been again reperusing.


"Oh yes! I thought I saw Eustace on a great black horse, and that he was galloping to a deep river, and could not stop him; and I thought that I saw Eustace flung off, and just as he was sinking you woke me. Oh dear, I'm so glad 'twas

but a dream. See, Cary, you dropped a slip of paper. What is it?"

Caroline as well as she could turned aside the question of her sister, and began to talk of the uneasy way that Louisa was sleeping, and so forth. Hastily crumpling up the letter, she told Louisa to try and go to sleep again, as it was very early yet, and wanted several hours to breakfast-time.

"I declare," cried Louisa, "the dream was so horribly like reality, that I do not think that I can fall asleep again. 'Tis well I'm not superstitious like you, Cary, or I'd interpret this dream most unluckily."

"I never believe in dreams," said Caroline, "though I admit that I hate to begin anything on a Friday if I can help it. But go off to sleep, girl, again." And Caroline kissed her, while she drew the curtain around her, and glided out of the room, in a much less happy state of mind than she had entered it. She lay down again in her bed, to think, and not to sleep. "Was it not very strange," she thought, "that Louisa should have been dreaming of Eustace at the very time that



I was thinking about him also, and while I had his letter in my hand? And such an ominous dream, too. Well, that is singular! Louisa touched me on a sore point when she boasted of not being superstitious. I am so in some things, though I know how foolish it is, and I would much rather that she had not that dream about Eustace at the very time that I was thinking of the slip in the letter, which Louisa has not seen."


When Caroline, some hours afterwards, descended to the breakfast-room, she was received by Mrs. St. Pierre with a face smiling more good-humouredly even than was usual with her, and she was surprised by the words,

"Now guess what I have been doing this morning. I have been writing a pressing letter to Eustace Mildmaye to come down to us in a week's time, and spend some days here, that we may have a family party. I am sure that he will be very impolite if he will not come. And I wish you to add a postscript, urging him to comply with my invitation. Why, you look startled, dear Caroline!"

CHAPTER XVII.

AND Caroline *was* startled, and could scarcely help showing that she was so, when Eustace was thus again brought before her mind, after she had been thinking of him for so long a time already. However, she laughed off the idea of her being surprised, and in obedience to Mrs. St. Pierre's wishes, scribbled a few lines by way of postscript, expressing her hope that Eustace would not disappoint them at Belvyddyr, and that he would obey Mrs. St. Pierre's invitation as a command.

The morning was lovely. The blue sky was mottled with white fleecy clouds, and the temperature was not too hot. The road to Llangaer ran through a varied country, and the views on either side were



romantic and interesting. Mrs. St. Pierre was in a chatty mood, and talked a great deal of old gossip about the Gwynne family, and recounted various anecdotes about old Lady Gwynne, the grandmother of Sir Vaughan, who was a fashionable lady of great celebrity in the days when Georgiana Duchess of Devonshire shone a star in the fashionable world. The stories told of Lady Gwynne had some interest for Caroline; but Miss Tufton, who was quite a novice in aristocratic life, drank in eagerly the curious revelations of high life that Mrs. St. Pierre related.

Llangaer was decidedly a beautiful place, even for North Wales. It was strikingly picturesque and bold in its scenery, less sublime and less perfectly beautiful than other places; but there was a singularity about the long series of hills that encircled it, all, with their jagged summits, looking as if they were castellated remains, that the eye was at once riveted and pleased. The large lawn deserved the encomium of Lord Beauparc, and the castle itself seemed at a distance most majestic and imposing, placed half-way up a hill, at the very

corner of a glen, and showing its numerous turrets in broad relief against the backgrounds of a deep fir-wood. To the right a mountain-stream dashed hoarsely over a stony bed, and Mrs. St. Pierre and her portion of the company could be discerned wending their way slowly along a lower road that led by the river's banks, and conducted up the ravine to the right of the castle.

When they approached the castle itself, the Mildmayes' quick eye in effect soon perceived that the castle itself was in the pepper-box style described by Lord Beauparc so satirically. It wanted massiveness and architectural grandeur, and was a ready-made piece of Gothic imposture. They were displeased with finding that what looked so well at a distance was such a cheat upon the taste. They found the hall-door open, and Wilmot rang the bell, but said, "I know the ways of the place; you can come in, the housekeeper will be here presently." The hall was accordingly entered. It was a square apartment, and was filled with several large-sized paintings.

"If these are any good," said Caroline, "the collection must be a valuable one."

"All the pictures in this hall," said Wilmot, "were brought from Italy by the late Sir Vaughan himself. See, what a collection of 'Salvators' he made!"

There were not less than six very striking specimens of Salvator's pencil, so judiciously selected that there was no monotony in their being hung together. The Mildmayes were both great admirers of Salvator, as most women are who have a sense of the romantic in effect, and they stood looking at them for a few minutes.

"Come this way," cried Wilmot, "and I'll show you one of the most splendid 'Sir Joshuas' in England—a portrait of the famous Lady Gwynne, Sir Vaughan's grandmother."

"I do not admire the face," said Caroline; "those eyes are too searching, and too bold in their expression. The face is fitter for a man, and even in a man that expression of scrutiny would be repulsive."

There was a difference of opinion amongst the circle: some admired, and others disliked the face; all praised the artist's talent.

"'Tis as like Sir Vaughan," said Wilmot, carelessly, "as if he sat for it in petticoats."

They left the breakfast-room, and proceeded throughout the suite of apartments. The housekeeper did not make her appearance, but an upper-servant attended, who happened to know little of the place, being a new-comer, and the household establishment was not large. In the music-room were four large landscapes from Sir Vaughan's own hand, representing scenes in the Pyrenees, from sketches made by himself on the spot.

"Are these really Sir Vaughan's?" cried Caroline Mildmay; "there is vast power in them, Mr. Wilmot, and a great deal of originality."

"Aw," cried Lord Beauparc, "they are deficient—aw—in keeping, and breadth of effect—aw—unfinished, too—aw—yes—decidedly—not finished—aw——"

"Ah, there is great merit in them, though," said Caroline, looking at them with much interest. And she continued to gaze upon them, while the rest of the company turned to other objects. The

suite of rooms terminated at a quadrangle : there was an octagon chamber at one side of a long drawing-room, and at the other end was a small library, in which Miss Tufton and Caroline Mildmaye found themselves together. The servant was in attendance upon the rest of the party, to whom Wilmot was acting as cicerone.

“Let them criticise as they please,” said Caroline, “Llangaer is a most beautiful place, and happy the man ought to be who——”

She was finishing the sentence, but her eye was attracted by a door opposite to her opening, and a gentleman stood in the doorway, while Sally Tufton, without perceiving the fact, said, with hoidenish vivacity,

“And happy the woman who’ll one day be Lady Gwynne!”

If the portrait of Sir Joshua Reynolds had suddenly become incarnate and had donned male attire, it would have presented such a figure as now stood before Caroline Mildmaye. A glance at the countenance, and she felt convinced that it must be Sir Vaughan Gwynne that stood

before her, though, with the rest of her party, she imagined that he had been still in London. He must have heard the remarks made by herself and Sally Tufton, and Caroline, as she encountered his scrutinising eyes, blushed to her temples. She felt that the words of Sally Tufton must have sounded coarsely and vulgarly in Sir Vaughan's ears, and she felt confused, and her feelings were not set at ease by the look of the countenance, which, though with many fine features, had something suggesting coldness and hauteur. The eyes were large, and well opened, but were unpleasantly searching in their glance. The general expression of the face was that of strength of will and mental force; and the square-built figure and closely-knit frame, with its powerful muscular development, was in physical accordance with the aspect of the countenance.

Sir Vaughan (for it was he, who had arrived from London sooner than he had anticipated) was, on his part, considerably surprised at seeing two ladies in his library. Llangaer was out of the route of the sight-seeing visitors of Wales, and his place, at

least his house, was not generally considered to be a "lion," though undoubtedly his gallery of pictures merited the attention of the connoisseurs. It was very rarely, therefore, that any strangers came to Llangaer. He heard also the remark of Sally Tufton, and thought it coarse, though as it was never meant to reach the ear of any one but her companion, there was really nothing indecorous in it. His eye glanced from Caroline to Sally Tufton, and though Miss Tufton was not without personal advantages, her high teeth so disfigured her mouth, as to deprive her of any claim to beauty, while she bore herself also rather awkwardly, so as to deprive her really good figure of its natural effect. His hat was upon his head at the time he opened the door, but he at once removed it, and looked towards Caroline, as if he thought that some explanation would come from her in the first instance. He bowed slightly, and said, in a deep contralto voice of the most powerful kind,

"You wish, perhaps, to see the paintings?"

Caroline at once recovered from her

slight confusion, while Sally Tufton's face continued of the deepest crimson.

"We have been just taking that liberty," said Caroline. "My cousin, Mrs. St. Pierre——"

"Oh!" cried Sir Vaughan, while his face immediately assumed a far more agreeable appearance, "you have come over from Belvyddyr. And is Mrs. St. Pierre here?"

All was rapidly explained. Sir Vaughan and Wilmot were equally surprised to meet each other so unexpectedly. All the company were in turn presented to Sir Vaughan, who put at once more cordiality in his manners than might have been anticipated he possessed. The Mildmayes attracted his special notice, and he looked from one sister to the other with something like a stare, stronger and more continued than was quite in accordance with politeness. He frankly enough consented to join the party to the glen, after first proffering them the hospitalities of the castle.

Mrs. St. Pierre was overjoyed to meet Sir Vaughan. She drew him aside, and conversed with him in a very animated

style. He was one of her channels of communication with the great persons in office, and the Belvyddyr influence was of considerable importance to Sir Vaughan in a political point of view. He recounted to her the amusing incident of surprising Sally Tufton and Caroline Mildmaye in his library, and asked several questions about the Mildmaye sisters.

"Oh! you shall see more of them if you come over to Belvyddyr next week," said Mrs. St. Pierre. And she looked with feelings of gratification towards her cousins.

While the party was strolling about the glen and preparations were making for the open-air dinner, there came a sudden lowering of the sky, and the temperature became chill. Rapidly the signs of a change of weather appeared, and it was judged expedient to retreat to the castle without delay. Sir Vaughan was much pleased at it, and it was arranged that the repast was to take place in his dining-room. The guests again strolled through the rooms and surveyed the pictures. Mr. Baskervyll seized hold of Sir Vaughan, and began to tell him of "a very singular thing," and


insisted on dragging the company into the library, which had not been seen previously, except by Caroline Mildmaye and Miss Tufton in their brief intrusion into it.

“Sir Vaughan,” said Mrs. St. Pierre, “has many presentation copies of curious books, given by their writers to his grandfather, Sir Ludlow Gwynne.”

“What new book is this?” cried Mr. Baskervyll. “‘Tooke on Prices.’ Ah! I see, Sir Vaughan, you follow Boileau’s advice,

‘Prends-moi le bon parti, laisse-là tous les livres ;
Exerce-toi, mon fils, dans ces hautes sciences :
Prends, au lieu d’un “Platon,” ce “Guidon des Finances.”’

Yes! ’tis an age of ‘economists and calculators,’ though I won’t add with Burke, ‘the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever.’ Ah! what have we here? A presentation copy of ‘The Birth and Triumph of Love.’ Oh! I recollect. This was by Sir James Bland Burgess. The verse was good enough for an Under-Secretary of State. The designs of those *amoretti alati* came from the pencil of the Princess Elizabeth. Trash! trash! Look in the very first start how the poet commences: ‘That



boy and that boy's deeds shall not pollute my measure.' Sir James would like to muzzle Cupid's mouth like a terrier in the dog-days. Poh! 'Optat ephippia bos piger.' 'Twas *shimful* for a minister of state to expose himself so! What's this? 'View of the French Revolution,' by Lord Erskine: a very flimsy view it is. Erskine appears in it, to use an expression of Themistius, *μαλα σοφιστικως και σοβαρως*. Ladies, I beg all your pardons! He was an advocate, and a great one. Of him and Lord Ellenborough I could say,

'—Hos mirabantur Athenæ
Torrentes, pleni et moderantes fræna theatri.'


What have we here? 'Letter to a Noble Lord.' Ah! ha! And a presentation copy from Burke, dated 'Beaconsfield.' Of vast value: that would fetch a great price at Christie's,—style inimitable, after making due critical allowance for the exaggerations of its *splendida bilis*. Virgil alone can describe it, 'Tres imbris torti radios.' You know that vivid passage in the eighth of the 'Æneid.' What big quarto have we here? 'Fox's History of James the Second.' Ah! an exception to the remark

of Pliny, 'Historia, quoquo modo scripta, delectat.' Its style reminds me of the very singular story of Gibbon and the Duke of Cumberland. When Gibbon published the third volume of 'The Decline and Fall,' he was met by the duke, who said to him, 'I see you're always at it, Mr. Gibbon: scribble, scribble, scribble.' "

This last anecdote really made the party around burst out laughing, which they had been long wishing to do, while Mr. Baskervyll was discharging with volubility his dogmatic opinions *de omnibus*. Of course he never saw that the laughter was at himself, and he was preparing for another burst, when Mrs. St. Pierre fortunately thought of the music-room, and proposed to have some music, desiring Miss Tufton to give them a song.

"Yes! a morning concert while the winds are keeping up such an *obligato* accompaniment outside," cried Wilmot, "will be very delightful."

"By all means let us have some music," said Lord Beauparc; and the grand piano was soon put in requisition. There was, of course, on the part of the musicians, due



protestations that their voices were out of order; but Sally Tufton, knowing her inferiority as a vocalist, wisely resolved to lead off, and diminish the force of contrast with the Mildmayes. She squalled through one of her Bath boarding-school songs, and relinquished her seat as soon as possible.

"Now, Louisa," said Mrs. St. Pierre, "you must play." And Louisa played off with her light and brilliant style of graceful execution.


Sir Vaughan stood near the piano with his back to the wall, and scrutinised her with his habitual stare. "Deuced clever-looking girl!" thought he to himself. "There must be great talent there. Pity she has not a better nose, and she would be perfection."

"Now for a song," cried Mrs. St. Pierre, who with more zeal than discretion was eager to show off the accomplishments of the Mildmayes. Caroline was of course obliged to sit down to the piano, and soon fascinated the general attention with her rendering of Moore's ballad of "Bend-meer's Stream," which she warbled in a style of long-drawn-out cadences, exhibit-

ing the richness and depth of her voice, though not doing full justice to her knowledge of music, which was considerable.

While Caroline was singing, her sister Louisa watched with considerable interest the face of Sir Vaughan Gwynne. As Caroline had at first been repelled by the expression of the face of the baronet, so, on the other hand, Louisa saw much to admire in the air of mental prowess that appeared impressed on his masculine features. Louisa liked strong, and Caroline admired refined natures, and there was something announcing superiority in the bearing of Sir Vaughan, with his careless air of quiet assured strength, that was particularly pleasing to Louisa's fancy. "I like that face," she said to herself, "better than any I have seen yet at Belvyddyr." And Louisa hoped to know more of him.

How hard it is to be entirely unselfish in this world, even where our feelings are those of sincere affection for another! Louisa Mildmaye was far more attached than the majority of sisters to Caroline; and yet at the moment when she caught the sight of the rapturous admira-



tion which beamed in the face of Sir Vaughan Gwynne while Caroline was warbling "Bendemeer's Stream," Louisa thought to herself, "How much I should like to have such a voice as Caroline has ! Sir Vaughan evidently admires her—perhaps may be fascinated with her ; and yet I have qualities more calculated to be attractive to Sir Vaughan than Caroline."

In these latter thoughts Louisa Mildmaye reasoned wrongly. Men generally like their opposites in the other sex, and seldom unite with women possessing a character exactly similar to their own. It would appear as if nature had arranged that there should be variety and constant dissimilarity in society, by its happy mixture of opposite individualisms united in the matrimonial tie. Sir Vaughan Gwynne, with his firmness and bold character, was more likely to be charmed with the softness and sensibility of Caroline Mildmaye, and her more pensive style of beauty, than with the more active intellect and animated manners of Louisa.

What a study the music-room at Llangaer then presented ! Mrs. St. Pierre, who,

like all match-makers, thought herself the quintessence of matrimonial philanthropists, was perfectly happy as she saw Sir Vaughan's face lighted up with admiration while Caroline sang,


"Thus memory draws from delight ere it dies,
An essence that breathes of it many a year;
And dear to my heart as 'twas then to my eyes,
Is that bower by the side of the calm Bendemeer."

Sally Tufton looked stupid and silly, and felt that her fortune could not render her so fascinating an object as a beautiful girl like Caroline, with a fine voice. The Parkyns girls rankled with resentment. They had, before the arrival of the Mildmayes at Belvyddyr, been of some importance to Mrs. St. Pierre, but their star was eclipsed by the "rival sisters," and they felt the pangs of discomfiture and envy; and they looked sulkily at Sir Vaughan while he muttered his raptures. Wilmot's eyes were fixed thoughtfully upon Louisa Mildmaye, and, unobserved by the rest of the company, he regarded her with fixed and earnest attention. Louisa herself scrutinised the face of Sir Vaughan Gwynne with more attention than she had

ever before bestowed upon any of the opposite sex. Lord Beauparc was calculating whether if he had the Llangaer estate he should decide upon knocking down the castle. The suite of rooms inside somewhat reconciled him to the Brummagem Gothic of its outside. Mr. Baskervyll was racking his brains for a parallel passage in the "Greek Anthology" to the closing thought of the song of "Bendemeer's Stream." And thus they were occupied, when a servant announced that the repast was ready, and they all moved to the dining-room, Mrs. St. Pierre desiring Sir Vaughan Gwynne to hand out Miss Mildmaye.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE was a debate as to who should sit at the head, and who should occupy the foot of the table. It was decided by Mrs. St. Pierre taking the head, as if she was at Belvyddyr. "And you, Sir Vaughan," she said, "must sit opposite me, at the end." Caroline was accordingly led towards the foot of the table, and placed at Sir Vaughan's right hand. The more she looked at him, the less she liked him. He had a capital face for a barrister, or for some person who desired to exercise strong powers of personal ascendancy over others. There was a dominating tone about him, as if he had something in him that would be obeyed. There was not the least coarse-



ness, however. His lips and mouth were well cut and firmly compressed, and did not suggest anything sensual. His cheeks were full and fair, and his look of health and vigour was in keeping with the appearance of strength that sat upon the whole man. It is but rarely that men with fair complexion have a look of power, and the exceptions to that rule are perhaps the more striking on that very account.

Sir Vaughan tried to be as fascinating as he could. He was all smiles, courtesy, and attention to Caroline. She received his profuse politeness with well-bred ease, but did not in the slightest degree, beyond the demands of mere conventional ceremony, respond to the advances, that, it was plain to all the table, were meant to be flattering. Her notice was often directed towards Wilmot, who was at the opposite side of the table, seated a little lower down, and whose handsome face appeared radiant with happiness, as he poured forth a stream of gay and animated conversation, for the amusement of Louisa Mildmaye by his side. And Louisa never looked better, or seemed in higher spirits. Somehow or

she took it into her head that she might have as good a chance of becoming Lady Gwynne as any one else. She saw that already Sir Vaughan was paying attention to Caroline, and though Louisa did not in the slightest degree wish to injure Caroline's chance of being received into rank and station before herself, still she thought that Sir Vaughan would find herself more suited to his taste and character. Louisa, however, had not the least notion of endeavouring to attract Sir Vaughan's attention away from her sister and towards herself: and there was nothing blameable in the fact that Louisa really did admire the appearance of Sir Vaughan, and all she had heard of him increased her prepossession in his favour.

Wilmot was deeply in love with Louisa, though he succeeded in disguising the fact from observation. Her vivacity, her animation, her sparkling talk, and gay, bright look of enjoyment, were very pleasing to him, and so swayed his feelings that he resolved to dare his fate, and embark in matrimony, if Louisa would accept his hand. He knew that, as compared with

the class of society in which they both moved, he was not rich. He allotted to his mother a portion of the salary of his office; and his private resources, exclusive of his salary, were very small. But Wilmot was enamoured, and preferred Louisa without a penny, to Miss Tufton with her high teeth, her silliness, and eighty thousand pounds. He felt that he might be happy, even though he were poor, with a charming and accomplished woman like Louisa Mildmaye, while he should be miserable with a Sally Tufton. He resolved to offer his hand to Louisa, and never doubted that there could be any obstacle on her side to its acceptance.

After the dinner was over, and the desert removed, the parties dispersed through the castle in various directions, and the pictures were again looked over. The company broke up into groups of twos and threes, and it so chanced that in the small octagon chamber adjoining the drawing-room, Wilmot and Louisa Mildmaye were alone, regarding some family miniatures.

"Well, certainly," said Louisa, "the castle is very much better inside than out-

side. There is more taste shown in the decorations and furniture than in the building itself."

"The castle is undoubtedly faulty in its construction," rejoined Wilmot, but with a sigh. "Heigh ho! I know that I wish very much that I had such a castle in my possession, and means to maintain it."

"Indeed!" said Louisa, laughingly; "and pray what would you do with it? I suppose that you'd augment the stock of nightcaps for your London visitors, and concentrate your talent on a grand scheme for reforming the Poor Laws."

"I'd first of all arrange for installing a Lady Gwynne. She should be beautiful, fascinating, and accomplished;" and then lowering his voice, he added, "And she at whose feet I would kneel is not far from me now."

Have you on some summer day, when the sun's rays are irradiating the whole landscape with the brightness of June, suddenly seen a dark cloud sweep across the sky, while the temperature has suddenly grown chill? Even so was the change in the bright and lately animated features of

Louisa Mildmaye. In a moment after Wilmot had made his declaration to her, the smiles vanished, and the face was cold, clouded, and repellent!

She said nothing, but seemed confused and annoyed, and she *was* annoyed, for she had been indulging a momentary day-dream of becoming Lady Gwynne! If Mr. Wilmot had addressed her in a similar way the day before she would not have received his proposal (for such it was in fact) with the chilling coldness she displayed in the octagon-room.

A close observation of life, and of the Mildmayes especially, makes me feel that there is one fault from which more evil results to both men and women than is commonly supposed. There are some small follies which in some instances inflict terrible injuries on their victims—almost as much as those open and shameless infractions of right that shock by their enormity. Amongst these faults is that of wilfulness—the perverse casting of the reins to our feelings, and the flinging aside the counsels of sense and reflection. Wilfulness is nothing more (and it need not

be worse) than rebellion against the rule which our judgment would vainly try to impose upon us. We see what is right, but we capriciously will not follow the road lying so clearly before us, but must wander into the path where fancy's *ignis fatuus* would lead us. Too late—too late do we see and acknowledge our error.

The besetting fault of the Mildmayes (though from the peculiar circumstances of their life it had not much appeared) was a certain hasty wilfulness, partaking of personal pride and caprice in forming an opinion upon persons. Both sisters at times manifested this quality. They had shown in it their eager likings and dislikings before their father's death, and their own fall in the world. My readers will recollect how at the Dryford ball, when they were flattered with the notice of the Ulverston party, they became somewhat too proud and reserved with older acquaintances, even of such pretensions as Lord Latimer. Their sudden and simultaneous admiration for Mr. Wilmot also, a hanger-on upon the Ulverston party, with the official *prestige* of being an *employé* of

Lord Ulverston, was somewhat wilful, as well as their comparative neglect of him afterwards, when they found that he had exchanged the diplomatic line, and the road of political ambition, for the unromantic situation of an Assistant Poor-Law Commissioner. He was as amiable, as insinuating, as handsome (and more accomplished) as when they had seen him first, but the "rival sisters," though not insensible to his personal merits, or to the fascinations of his manner, were not so ready to acknowledge his good qualities. It was the same wilfulness that made them so reserved and haughty in their cottage at Rosebank, and kept them aloof from the excellent society in which (notwithstanding their narrow circumstances) they might have mingled.

And this very fault had positively increased under their affliction. Their character had become more fixed, and their personal habits more deeply set, in their self-imposed seclusion in their cottage at Rosebank. They had borne the chastening hand of Heaven with feelings almost nearer akin to Pagan stoicism than to

Christian humility. Even Mrs. St. Pierre, in her observation of their characters, had remarked to herself, that though they were virtuous and strictly moral in their thoughts and actions, they had but little of that humility which can take up the Cross, and bear trials with something of the spirit that ought to be learned from Divine example. They had not suffered so much from their fall as other women would have done. Their high intellectual endowments, their love of reading, and eminent capacity for excelling in music and with the pencil, relieved their seclusion from the tedium of solitude. They had also a strongly romantic sense of the beauty of Nature, especially Caroline, and as they took their afternoon or evening walk, and marked the features of the landscape changing with the season, and saw the western sky lighted up by a setting sun, they felt the rapturous delight of elevated intellectual feelings, and revelled in the largeness of soul that an elaborate education had developed in their gifted natures. I have seen that men of brilliant parts, who can commune upon something like

terms of equality with the great intellects of past or of modern ages, often become solitary, unsocial, and, perhaps, intellectually selfish, and lead a life of (to them) voluptuous enjoyment, though they receive nought but meat, clothes, and fire. And I saw at that period of their lives something of this character in the wilfulness of the "rival sisters," and trace it to its source.

It was this wilfulness, that made Louisa so severely cold and frigid all of a sudden to Wilmot, when he made addresses to her in the octagon-chamber at Llangaer. In a few hours, how suddenly capricious she had become on the sight of Sir Vaughan Gwynne, and on the floating vision of her fancy that she might be Lady Gwynne! It was this wilfulness that Caroline also showed, when she felt such sudden distaste for Sir Vaughan Gwynne, and turned with something like aversion from his piercing stare, to view with complacent regard the animated and winning features of the graceful Wilmot. Strange perversity of human destiny! Thus when after the storm subsided, and the Belvyddyr party had wound its way home, when the

"rival sisters" retired to the "blue-room," each of them was thinking with pleasure of the man who did not regard herself, but the other sister!

And now the night is fine, and the moon is silvering the scene with her rays. Mountain and vale are illumed by the pale Cynthia of the night. All is solemn and sublimely still, save the whispering of the wind through the trees, or the hoarse noise of the waterfall, over which the increased torrent is falling rapidly. Once more again Caroline looks out upon that scene, which had met her eyes in the early morning's dawn. Since then the sky has been clouded, and a storm has rent the heavens. Far out to sea she can trace its remains in the mottled sky. She recollects the letter of Eustace her cousin, and her reading of it in the early morning. She remembers the dream of Louisa about Eustace, and the trace of reverie in which she indulged in thinking of the position of herself and Louisa, and what their fates might be.

Say—what shall be their fates? Shall their lives resemble the shade and sunshine of this eventful day (for we will see that it

was so to both of them), in which clouds and tempest lowered fearfully over the landscapes, but which finally disappeared, and left the sun to set in a glorious evening? Or, shall the ending of their day of life be one of melancholy shadow? Or, shall the star of one of them maintain its ascendancy, while the other be utterly eclipsed? This we shall know as we advance in the story of these "rival sisters."

"I do so wish, girls," said Mrs. St. Pierre one morning, "that your cousin would soon arrive at Belvyddyr. Caroline, you must write him a line to say that we expect some pleasant visitors. I have had a letter to-day from one who calls herself 'a religious lady,' and who has a very handsome fortune. I think she would make a capital wife for Eustace, if they would only take a fancy to each other."

"And who may the lady be?" cried Caroline, with eagerness at the idea of Eustace being talked of with any one else. Little did Mrs. St. Pierre know that the young clergyman was already devoted to another.

"The lady that I mean promises to be

here to-morrow. But I doubt whether you will much like her, for there is much about her that I do not myself approve or admire. Her name is Fanny Bunbury."

"Fanny Bunbury!" exclaimed Caroline, with surprise.

"Fanny Bunbury!" cried Louisa Mildmaye, in a tone denoting equal astonishment.

"The same. Do you know aught of her?" said Mrs. St. Pierre.

"I take for granted," said Louisa, "that she is the Miss Bunbury who was at school with us at Bath—a clever, flighty, witty girl she was, very satirical, and very ugly."

"She had a great deal of talent, but no taste whatever," said Caroline. "Her tongue was very flippant, very unfeminine, and very amusing. I think that her father was a clergyman, and an author of some kind."

"It's the same—the very same girl," said Mrs. St. Pierre. "She was introduced to me by Mrs. Thorold, the wife of the Bishop of Launceston, who, I think, was hoping to get her married to young

Harry Thorold. Her father was Doctor Bunbury, the Dean of Barstow, a writer of *belles lettres*, who lived and died in great difficulties; but his brother, a watch-maker in Cheapside, left a considerable fortune to Fanny—how much it may be I really do not know, but it is very large. Miss Fanny has no fixed home, but always roams about amongst her acquaintances, and is a very great visitor. As an heiress, I suppose she thinks herself a vast acquisition, though I confess I do not much like her society; but in a country house like this, she makes a good rattle.”

“I should like to know,” cried Louisa, “has she still her habit of giving people nicknames, and thinking it witty?”

“I am sorry to say she has,” said Mrs. St. Pierre, “and a truly unladylike habit it is.”

“Well, we shall be very glad to see her,” said Caroline. “It is always pleasant to meet old schoolfellows. How the world has changed since we were five years ago at Bath!”

Louisa sighed as her sister said this. She would, perhaps, have sighed deeper if

she knew what effect upon her happiness the arrival of Miss Bunbury at Belvyddyr would produce.

The season for visitors had arrived, and Mrs. St. Pierre was in all her glory, entertaining with hospitality a crowd of fashionable friends, who came from north and south. The Mildmaye girls were much noticed and admired, and there was deep interest expressed about them. They were decided ornaments to the household of Mrs. St. Pierre, who herself began to feel very affectionately towards them both. Lord Beauparc had been taken off by Mr. Baskervyll to his park in Yorkshire, but the great pedant spoke of buying Cwyrn Lodge, within five miles of Belvyddyr, as a marine residence, and they were to return again to Mrs. St. Pierre before the season was over. Wilmot went and came, spending two or three days out of each week at Belvyddyr, and going to the town of T——, his official quarters, for the remaining portion of the week. Sir Vaughan Gwynne had been two or three times balked in his attempt to leave Llangaer Castle, but he was daily expected; and

Eustace Mildmaye also was to come positively, after having twice, and even thrice, failed to arrive with the punctuality that was generally shown by him.

The Mildmaye girls were dressed for dinner, and sitting in their "blue-room," where they used often read and draw, just as at Rosebank Cottage. It was quite uncertain whether Eustace would arrive that day or not, and Caroline was really beginning to feel anxious to see him. Unconsciously, perhaps, to herself—for she did not care to analyse closely the feelings of her heart—the seeds of love were already germinating in her bosom, and from the moment that Mrs. St. Pierre had so confidentially spoken to them of the desire that Eustace might be married to Miss Bunbury, she reverted again and again to the image of her handsome cousin, the young clergyman. On the other hand, Louisa Mildmaye felt, she knew not why or wherefore, a strong desire to captivate Sir Vaughan Gwynne. She heard him praised so much, and his general appearance pleased her, and she thought that she saw in his face a character that

she admired—bold, broad, and comprehensive; and yet Louisa Mildmaye could not help feeling that Harry Wilmot was a handsomer man than Sir Vaughan, and was quite as clever. Nor was she without a perception of the fact that Wilmot was deeply smitten with herself.

Both girls had been dressed for some time, and were lounging over some light reading, preparatory to going down to the drawing-room together. They knew that some new visitors had arrived, but had not been informed of who they were; nor did they even ask, for it was a rather striking trait in the characters of the Mildmayes, that to general society they affected a sort of listless indifference, and were quite free from that perpetual curiosity about persons that is so often shown by even the most sedate of their sex.

A light tapping, evidently from a female hand, came to their door.

“Come in!” cried Caroline; and though they had not met for some years, and had changed in their appearance, there could be no doubt as to who was their visitor. Yes! it was their old schoolfellow, Fan

Bunbury, more forward, more flippant, more personal in her remarks, with more freckles in her face, and flounces to her petticoats, than ever.

"Fan Bunbury" was no beauty, and, in the taste of some persons, she would have been voted a hideous fright. Her hair was very foxy, and the skin on her face mottled with as many freckles as the shell of a turkey egg. Her nose was the best feature she had, as it was sure to call up glorious associations, being the very fac-simile of that of "le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre." Her mouth was well chiselled, with good teeth, and her eyes sparkled with more than French vivacity, and beamed with fun and sarcastic spirit. She had a pretty musical voice, though the key was rather high; her figure was light, graceful, and feminine, and her dress the most elegantly *recherché* that Regent-street milliners could devise.

Before the Mildmayes could say a word, she opened the ball of conversation.

"Then you are both the two charming Miss Mildmayes that were along with me at the very polite and puritanical Miss

Antrobus's Birch and Backboard Academy, for finishing off brilliant girls like ourselves. Dear me! How time flies since I met the 'Rival Sisters' last, for that's your new name I hear; but don't you recollect, Caroline, how I used always to call you 'Darky Ducky,'—that was my endearing term for you; and Louisa, don't you recollect that I christened you 'Gosselin Greensleeves,' when you got the green silk spencer with the long sleeves, like one Lady Gosselin had. There you are both of you grown up such charming girls! Alas! alas! what changes there have been in the world since! Both of us have lost our fathers—but, my dears——"

And then, *apropos* of the decease of Dr. Bunbury and Mr. Mildmaye, she poured forth some sentimental platitudes upon the uncertainty of human affairs, and garnished her discourse with sundry texts from the sacred volume. It was the most unpleasing, and to many persons offensive point in the character and manners of Fan Bunbury, that vain, flighty, coquettish though she was, she had a habit of dragging in Scripture in her conversation, in a way calculated to

offend not only really pious persons, but also people of real good taste. She affected what an illustrious orator once said was a main character of religious enthusiasts, "a noisy familiarity with their Maker."* It would be a hopeless task for me to attempt describing this particular characteristic of Miss Bunbury. If her character was delineated literally, some of my readers would be very properly offended, for that which passed off with her perpetual vivacity and flippancy, would in print read very offensively. Not intending, therefore, to portray that part of her manners, I would scarcely allude to it here, were it not that it annoyed the Mildmaye girls very much, and made them, with other causes, take a great dislike to her.

"Well," she continued, "and how are you off for beaux? How many are in your train, Darky Ducky?"

Caroline bridled at the familiarity of Miss Bunbury's address, but she did not show her displeasure at once. She simply answered,

* Mr. Grattan on "Methodism."

“It is for a Miss Bunbury to have a train of admirers——”

“Who would have a train of such useless persons,” said Louisa, with much sprightliness, in which a touch of sarcasm was discoverable, “if not a wit, a beauty, and an heiress?”

“Well done, Miss Greensleeves; I see your tongue is sharp as ever—just as keen as when you had ‘the encounter of wit’ with Miss Saunders, the governess, when you were returned by her, and old Madam Antrobus sentenced you to get forty lines of ‘Pope’s Essay on Man,’ under pain of not allowing you to the archery fête at Box Hill. Oh dear! how the time does fly! Do you recollect, girls, the time when we lined Miss Saunders’s sheets with nettles, and had her tossing about at night, and the day that we tore off from the baker’s advertisement the words ‘Bath Best Quality,’ and stuck it up the coat-collar of Hopley, the dancing-master?”

“Yes!” said Louisa Mildmaye; “and do you recollect the scrape that you brought us all into by kissing hands to the young officer, whom you mistook for your cousin John?”

"Don't I—and don't I recollect the grave face of Ducky Ducky when the officer began to follow us. Ha! ha! ha! Oh, how glad I am to meet you both again, as the poet says—which of them is it,—after 'all our wanderings round this world of care.' Oh! 'tis Goldsmith—now I recollect; and I fear that I have mangled his words, as Daddy Dryasdust says. Do you know Daddy Dryasdust?"

"I cannot conceive whom you mean," said Caroline.

"Who is this, child?" And Fan Bunbury clenched her right hand, and began to chatter with increased volubility. "Now, really, 'tis *shimful*—downright 'shimful'—that a pupil of Miss Antrobus's should not be more familiar with the poem of the 'Traveller.' And let me tell you a very singular thing about Goldsmith, that has never been in print."

The mimicry was perfect; it was really very good of its kind, and the Mildmayes could not help laughing at the exact imitation of the odd manner and voice of Mr. Baskervyll.

"Yes, my dears!" rattled away Fan

Bunbury, "I flatter myself that I take him off capitally, and 'tis only doing a kind turn by him, for I can tell you that he wishes to take me off. I was told by Lady Jephson, when I was on a visit in the spring, that old Daddy Dryasdust was making very particular inquiries about my fortune; and when I met him at Sir Hartopp Robinson's last winter, I contrived to fascinate the old lad by listening to his eruptions of pedantry, and marking, with due turning up of my eyes and sundry notes of admiration, the torrents of literary lava that this mountain of learning would discharge. I christened him Daddy Dryasdust, and he's called nothing ever since. I hope he'll be here, for I can tell you, my dears, I should like another flirtation with him vastly, and I should not have the least objection to be Mrs. Baskervyll, of Baskervyll Park. Once I was that, dears, shouldn't I make the old Dad's gold-dust fly about! I'd spirit him on to become a Peer—tell him that he was born

'Th' applause of listening senates to command;'

and that he should not

‘Waste his sweetness on the desert air;’

by which I'd mean a house in Belgravia, and an Opera box. Then, dears, once I was arrived at that, I'd give you such a pair of husbands! Oh, you ought to pray night and morning that you may see me Mrs. Daddy Dryasdust—otherwise the lady of that learned ornament of the senate, Joseph Jephson Baskervyll, Esq., M.P. But there's the bell; so let us descend. I have not been here for some time. What a place it is! And what a sweet woman is Mrs. St. Pierre! Ah! she is anchored in the safe haven of happiness. She is a true believer, and will never be one of the backsliders. She has chosen the good part, my dears; and rich and elevated though her lot may be, and gorgeous though her attire, she knows that ‘the fashion of this world waxeth old as a garment.’ But let us not be late. I hear Sir Vaughan Gwynne is to be here—a capital catch he'd be. I should not object to Llangaer Castle at all.”

All this chatter was rattled off with ex-

treme volubility, and much piquancy of manner. Nonsensical as was much of what she said, there was a sprightliness of style and constitutional gaiety about Miss Fanny Bunbury, that gave a bystander a not unpleasing sense of briskness and mental vivacity. In fact, the matter of the talk was silly and almost senseless, but her utterance of it in delivery was spirited, and she produced considerable conversational effect, for she was often greeted with repeated salutes of laughter, of which some, it must be confessed, was at herself, and was the reverse of complimentary. With "the great vulgar and the small," her gossip, her voluble tongue, her assurance, and air of happy, careless, and fashionable frivolity, made her pass off very much better than she deserved.

Do any of my readers know a Fanny Bunbury? If they look well about them they will not be long without seeing one. Their Fanny may not appear as confident, as flippant, and as noisy as the Fanny to whom I introduce them; but let them recollect Madame de Staël, "*ce grand*

mot de circonstances." An heiress, and taught to think much of herself, brought up without the care of a mother, the hardness and polished superficiality of boarding-school education had exaggerated into caricature the self-confidence and vanity of my Fanny, and made her exactly what she was, flippant, unfeminine, showy, and vanity-stricken. A Fan Bunbury is soon ground down into the veriest commonplace, if she be placed in an humble sphere of life ; or if her lot be cast in the middle classes, with their decorum and respectable regularity. But put her in the high places of society, educate her in luxury, and in that rank soil the foibles of her nature will, with tropical growth, attain the magnitude of vices. As she refines in manner, she will not also refine in character. She will mistake the sallies of impertinence for flashes of true humour, and confound volubility of talk with ease of conversation.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE Mildmayes were anything but gratified at their old schoolfellow's assumption of intimacy with them, which was kept up before the visitors in the same manner. The fact of their having fallen in the world, and ceased to be heiresses, made them even more sensitive to the familiarity and forwardness of Fan Bunbury. They were afraid of being taken for her friends, when they were only her schoolfellows. Thus, when on descending to the drawing-room, they were both excessively annoyed at her recounting to the assembled company the fact of their having been together at Miss Antrobus's, at Bath ; and when the guests at Bel-

vyddyr roared aloud at the school-girl anecdotes of Fan Bunbury, rattled out with her greatest vivacity, there were only two faces in the room not convulsed with laughter—those of the Mildmayes.


One of the bursts of laughter was cut short by the entrance of Sir Vaughan Gwynne. He had not long come, and his arrival had been looked forward to with great pleasure by Mrs. St. Pierre, and by many of her guests. He entered the drawing-room with his calm assured air, his firm unbending countenance, and manly beauty that one might have desired to be less physical in its aspect; but let the ladies criticise him as they pleased, they could not deny that he was a fine man. After shaking hands with several of the guests, and being introduced to others, Caroline, who was on an ottoman at the extreme end of the room, and before whom two or three persons were standing, observed him say something with eagerness to Mrs. St. Pierre, who looked around the room, and cast a glance in the direction where Caroline was seated. The latter was at once convinced that they

both intended she should be Lady Gwynne, and it flashed into her mind that the baronet supposed that he would have an easy conquest. "Nous verrons," said Caroline to herself.

Not a muscle of her face was relaxed while she returned his salutation, which was more than cordial. Women like to use power with a vengeance, when the few occasions in life, that the constitution of society gives to them, put it in their ability to display great influence. Caroline did not care for Sir Vaughan Gwynne, and she knew, or thought that she had some grounds for knowing, that he admired her. Call it what you please—caprice, wilfulness, perversity, or the love of female domination, it is certain that Caroline checked his advances, that the baronet's smiles were answered with cold looks, and his advances to intimacy treated with the most frigid and chilling courtesy. He handed her out to dinner, but had no better success, and he was deeply mortified by her manner, though there appeared no sign of mortification in his face. He would, perhaps, have never cared to ad-

dress another word to Caroline Mildmaye; indeed, while taking his wine after the ladies had retired, he had resolved not to trouble himself again about her; but when he returned to the drawing-room, where he saw her face beaming with smiles, and looking so bright and lovely —when he saw her seated at the tea-table, and thought how such a figure would become his castle, and observed her rounded arms, and the soft graceful style of her feminine beauty, Sir Vaughan relaxed in his resolves, and his wavering ceased when he heard her syren voice warbling after tea, singing an old English ballad, with a grace and purity of style that won his heart. Yes! he would not be conquered by a girl! Not he, indeed!

On the very next day, at noon, Eustace Mildmaye arrived. His presence was joyfully welcomed by the sisters, who were never so glad to see him as in the splendours of Belvyddyr. Nor was his arrival without some sensation amongst the throng of visitors then assembled at that gay abode. If Caroline Mildmaye was the



most beautiful, and Louisa the most captivating of the ladies then assembled, there was no question that amongst the male visitors Eustace bore the palm away with the greatest ease. "Who could look at a Sir Vaughan Gwynne by the side of cousin Eustace?" thought Caroline Mildmaye to herself. She had always admired her cousin, and she did so more now than ever, especially when she saw how much his handsome face and quietly graceful manners pleased the circle at Belvyddyr.

"Oh, my dears!" cried Fan Bunbury a day or two after the curate's arrival, "your cousin is a charming creature. He really looks one of the prettiest parsons I ever saw. I would prefer such a nice-looking young divine to a cornet of the Guards, or even a major of the line, any day. Such splendid eyes, and hair, and teeth—and oh! such a smile; and the more one looks at him, 'tis 'oh this!' and 'oh that!' for whatever feature you scan, he's almost perfect. Pity that he must be perpetually in those nasty black clothes! Don't you think, my dears, he might put on a lavender tie, and wear a lilac waistcoat? They

would become him amazingly, and would not be too gay. By the way, I am dying so to hear him preach. I am longing to hear him hold forth on things eternal, the glories of Heaven, and the fleeting nature of this transient world of care. Mrs. St. Pierre is so sorry for her steward, who fell dead yesterday of sunstroke, that I think it would be an excellent thing if he were to improve the occasion, and give us a short lecture to-night, when we are at prayers in the chapel. Will you ask him, Caroline?"

"No; I do not desire to interfere with the regular course of family worship, as has been arranged here. It is for Mrs. St. Pierre, in the absence of Mr. St. Pierre, as the head of the household, to do so. Perhaps my cousin may preach on Sunday next."


This conversation was carried on in the drawing-room, after dinner, when the ladies had retired. They were not very long there when they were joined by Eustace, who first of the gentlemen came away from the dining-room. He got a seat near Fan Bunbury, nearly opposite to Caroline

Mildmaye, at one of the large windows looking into a flower-garden. At the very moment when he entered the room one of the company, a Mrs. Ludlow, was telling of the noise and observations caused in her neighbourhood by a clergyman of the Established Church declining to reveal the facts of a confession made to him by a woman, who had been executed for the murder of her husband. The facts of the case were somewhat peculiar. The woman had always borne a fair character, and it was not supposed possible that she could be guilty of so great a crime as had been laid to her charge. The husband was for a long time weak in health, and the suddenness of his death had not at first excited suspicion ; but some circumstances oozed out that caused a strict inquiry, and in his stomach was found a considerable quantity of arsenic. The wife steadily denied the criminality imputed to her ; opinions were various and opposite as to her guilt. Vast interest was excited by her trial, and she was most ably defended by her counsel. Even after the jury brought in a verdict of " guilty," there

were not wanting those who still contended for her innocence. To the last day before she suffered she protested her innocence. When placed on the drop she declined to add to what she had previously said. It was known that she had made a statement of some kind to the clergyman, and that gentleman was appealed to by the prison authorities, by the magistrates of the district, and by the press; but the clergyman declined to make public what the convict had told him, and said that his intercourse with her had been entirely of a spiritual nature; and that the conversations, which he had held with her had been with a view to preparing her for the next world.

"Don't you think," said Mrs. Ludlow to Mrs. St. Pierre, "that the clergyman should have told whether the convict had confessed her guilt?"

"I know," replied Mrs. St. Pierre, "that there are various opinions upon the point, as to how far a clergyman should reveal the secrets of conscience. For my part, I do not agree with you; and I think the disclosures of a loaded conscience to a



minister of religion ought to be held sacred. Surely, the law of the land ought to be strong enough to deal with open criminality, without invading that mysterious faculty of the sinning mind, that craves for revelation of its fault."

While Mrs. St. Pierre was making these remarks, Caroline Mildmaye's attention was directed to the grave and clouded aspect of Eustace's face, as he sat opposite to her. She had never before seen him seem so grave, and, she thought, anxious in his looks.

It was Fan Bunbury's wont to dash into any subject, no matter how deep, and trust to her vivacity and quickness for floating. With her usual forwardness she took up the present conversation.

"You're quite right, Mrs. St. Pierre!" cried the fearless Fanny; "I think it would be a shocking thing for a clergyman of any church to reveal the secrets of conscience. The confessions of the soul, like the aspirations of the intellect, are above the power of human law, and should not be taken hold of by its authority. Guilty people ought to confess their sins

oftener than they do; and I should be glad to know, Mrs. Ludlow, how could you expect guilt-laden folk to have recourse to clergymen, if they were to suppose that the clergymen, when asked, would trumpet forth their crimes?"

"Oh, then, you are arguing for auricular confession, Miss Bunbury?" cried Mrs. Ludlow.

"The only auricular confession I approve of," said Fanny, with a toss of her little head, "is that which a young lady makes when she answers 'Yes' to the proper man, who puts the question, 'Could you love me?'"

The levity of the answer did not please either Mrs. St. Pierre or Mrs. Ludlow, but there was a laugh in the circle of the company. It had scarcely subsided, and before Mrs. Ludlow could continue the conversation, when Fanny Bunbury turned suddenly round, and said,

"Mr. Mildmaye can clear up the point, I do not doubt. Surely, Mr. Mildmaye, if a lady were to know herself to be guilty of a great crime, and, goaded by her anguished conscience, were to confess it to you, while

the terrors of the other life and of an outraged God were impending over her,—surely you would not publish to the whole world the secrets of a heart laid bare to you, when racked by the dreadful pangs of upbraiding conscience?”

Caroline's gaze had been for the last few minutes upon her cousin. Once she had caught his eye, and somehow or other she thought it betrayed much trouble. She could not conceive what there was to vex or annoy him. Troubled he certainly looked, as if some point had been broached or stirred which caused him some secret pain. While thinking with herself as to what might be the cause of his trouble, her attention was further riveted by observing his face when Miss Bunbury put to him the question thus recorded. He changed colour, and she read confusion in every line and feature of his countenance.

“I really should be tempted,” stammered forth Eustace, “to (a pause)—I really don't know that I should—that is, I should not be prepared to—that is to say, the matter appears so uncertain in various points of view, that, in

short, I should hardly know what to do——”

“ ‘Pon my word ! A pretty guide of consciences you would make, Mr. Mildmaye,” said Fan Bunbury. “ You have given a very clear account of what you would do.”

Thus taunted, the young clergyman blushed, and tried to conceal his confusion. Mrs. Ludlow, the lady who had introduced the question, looked at Eustace very sarcastically, as if she meant to say that he would never make a shining divine in the Church ; and Louisa Mildmaye was displeased at the hesitation and awkwardness of manner shown by her cousin. Caroline could not account for the confusion that she saw in his face, and heard in his faltering and inconclusive tongue.

After some further remarks the conversation was cut short by the rest of the gentlemen entering the room.

Sir Vaughan Gwynne seated himself near Mrs. Ludlow, who was from one of the Border counties, and was a professed enthusiast about scenery.

“ Have you ever,” said Sir Vaughan,

addressing himself to that lady, "seen Dysant Castle, Lord Rockforest's place? I hear it is very beautiful."

"Oh yes, repeatedly. The demesne is not well kept, but the shrubberies are most extensive. The castle is very fine, though not a first-rate specimen of the style of Gothic revival."

"Lord Beauparc," said Mrs. St. Pierre, "was giving us an account of Dysant Castle some time ago. He told me that he thought it greatly neglected."

"Do you know Lord Rockforest at all?" said Sir Vaughan.

"No! But I have seen him often at the races in our neighbourhood. He is rather handsome—extremely so, indeed; but he is much too gay for my taste."


"Yes!" said Sir Vaughan. "It is no libel to say that he has got the name of being wild."

"He takes after his mother, probably," said Fanny Bunbury in a play-house whisper to Caroline Mildmaye. Her remark was heard by Mrs. St. Pierre, who seemed extremely displeased with it. But she calmly observed,

“There were peculiar circumstances in the Rockforest family, that might make people feel charitably towards the young peer. I saw Lord Rockforest two years ago at Harrowgate, and I conceived a favourable opinion of him, on the whole. I hope he will make a similar impression on you all when you meet him next week, for I expect Lord Rockforest on a visit here on Tuesday next.”

“I shall be very glad to make his acquaintance,” said Sir Vaughan. “I was pointed out Lord Rockforest in London, and there is great power stamped on his countenance.”

Louisa Mildmaye had often heard that the son of that Lady Rockforest who dwelt within her neighbourhood in Kent was a very handsome man, and was distinguished in the world by appearance and courage, and perhaps also by his follies. She was curious to see him, and felt glad that he was coming. Had Caroline any feeling on the point? Look at her now. What are her eyes so fixedly gazing at? What has so fast bound her attention? See, she is looking at something in the



room with as rapt and absorbed a gaze as if she beheld a spirit. Ha! 'tis at the pale and perturbed countenance of her cousin Eustace Mildmaye: and well may she look on him! He is pale as if he had been glazed suddenly with horror, and his eyes are fixed on vacancy. He seems utterly forgetful of what presence he is in. There he stands, but a few feet from one of the windows that look towards the blue sea, heaving in the distance. But it is not to yon azure surface, nor to the sails of the outward-bound Indiaman in the offing, nor to the cutter yachts making for shore, nor to the curling smoke of an Irish steamer, nor to the molten canopy of clouds through which the sun has just descended, that his eyes are turned. His mind seems in a trance! Ha! he has just woken from it; and turning his back to the windows and the light, conceals by forced gaiety, and in conversation with the prattling Fanny Bunbury, the troubles of his thoughts.

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